The Desolation of Orbit, Followed by the Comfort of Collision

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The Desolation of Orbit, Followed by the Comfort of Collision

by Wr4ttttttthh

Summary

Will and Hannibal have been circling each other since the day the met. Hesitant and wary. Little did they know that uniting would bring them relief, not pain.

OR the one where Hannibal slightly manipulates Will and triggers his starve for touch, but accidently triggers his own need for touch. And the one where Will needs to be absolutely sure that what Bedelia said was right.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Of Calculations, and a Leap of Faith

When Hannibal woke, he woke up aching.

Not the physical kind - no, his gift from Francis Dalarhyde had stopped aching months ago. It was a deep, inset ache. The kind that felt as if he had been aching from birth.

He stared across the bed sheets. It was a large bed, though Hannibal only used one side. The other side was cold, the sheets perfect, the pillows straight. Hannibal stared at it and wished it wasn't so, hoped for warmth.

With a sigh, he flicked the blankets back. After making his bed, so both sides looked perfect and uninviting, Hannibal dressed. A salmon coloured button down, a black waist coat that matched his black pants. After using the bathroom, Hannibal made his way to the kitchen.

Hannibal thought it would take a twelve page essay, a thoroughly convincing speech, and a million years before he would ever live in a cottage. Yet here he was, and happy to live in the, albeit quaint, little home. When the fire was going, the whole house was warm. Even if Hannibal had the oven on for a while, the kitchen heated up pleasantly. The carpet was soft and the counters were marble, and the furniture was all a lovely varnished redwood.

Hannibal had all of breakfast's ingredients laid out on the counter top and set to work. He loved cooking and creating every single meal, loved to experiment or try new foods, even if he had to have them shipped in.

As he cooked, Will came in through the back door. Rocko, his chocolate labrador, came bounding in after him.

"Good morning, Will. Did you sleep well?"

"Yeah," Will puffed. Hannibal watched him pull a hair tie from his hair and slide it on his wrist. In the year they had spent since Dolarhyde, Will's hair had grown long enough to touch his shoulders. "Did Rocko wake you with his barking? He saw a rabbit."

"Not at all." He served two plates up while Rocko chowed into his own food.

This was their usual routine for their mornings - Will woke up early to feed and run the dog, and Hannibal would make the two of them breakfast, as well as lunch and dinner later in the day. They sat across from each other and ate in silence. Under the table, Rocko looked up at Hannibal, eyes large and brown.

"You know," Will started, "I always teach my dogs not to beg. Then you go and unteach it."

"Nonsense." Hannibal looked at his plate as he dropped a piece of ham. Rocko caught it before it hit the floor. "He doesn't whine or paw, nor does he beg to you."

Instead of responding, Will just huffed and scraped the rest of his food off his plate.

"I trust you will accompany me tomorrow," conveyed Hannibal.

"To the party?" He hummed, watching Will take their plates and move to the kitchen. He stayed at the table as there were no walls separating them. Following him with his eyes, Hannibal watched his dark hair slide over his neck, still sweaty from his run. His facial hair had grown some to hide what he could of the scar on his cheek.

Will rested his elbows on the bench, his eyes unmoving from Hannibal. In just over four years he had gone from a man who couldn't hold eye contact with even the closest of friends, to a man who could make Hannibal break away from his intensity.

"I suppose it would appear strange if Mr. Eliason was not there on his husband's arm. Strange enough to ask questions, with an important event like this."

Hannibal's lips ticked up at the corners. Mr. Arthur Eliason and Mr. Eddie Eliason were the names that Hannibal and Will, respectively, took up as their cover. After some conversation they had agreed to act as husbands. Although 'conversation' and 'agreed' were loose terms, as Hannibal had presented legitimate reasons - they both wanted to live together after the fall, but they looked too different to be brothers, and while having roommates at their age would not be unusual, others may raise questions of significant others, questions that neither of them wanted to answer to.

There were other reasons for two middle aged single men to live together. Reasons that weren't brought up. All because Hannibal wanted to have this, selfishly wanted to be able to show off Will at social events and take him to operas and plays. Will had agreed, and whether he knew of the other reasons or Hannibal's ulterior motive, he didn't say anything.

"It's a masquerade party. I think it would be fun for us to go separately and find each other at the event, without knowing what we will be wearing."

"Fun," repeated Will. He looked Hannibal up and down, analysing him. "Have you got something up your sleeve, Hannibal?"

"Not at all." It was the truth. All he wanted was to see Will in nice clothes in a classy setting. To have him on his arm.

Will stared at him for a little longer before he rolled his eyes. "Well we only have one car, and I'm not walking all the way to the University."

"I'll get Mr. Verry to pick me up," Hannibal insisted. "He was the one who invited us, after all. I'm sure he wouldn't mind."

There was a pregnant silence. Neither said anything, and Hannibal was almost offended with how wary Will was with him. Almost, because Will had every reason to second guess him, even when his intentions were, for the most part, innocent.

"Alright." Will pushed off the counter. "Guess I'll go check if my suit still fits."

The event in question was a charity event at the University where Hannibal and Will worked. Hannibal, or Arthur Eliason, was a literature professor, and Will, or Eddie Eliason, taught the science of forensics. They didn't see each other throughout the day, as their classes were on opposite sides of the campus. They shared a car on the way there and back, and that was it.

Mr. Verry indeed didn't mind picking Hannibal up. He sat in the passenger seat, Mrs. Verry in the backseat, who was in a long red sparkly dress to match her husband's maroon suit. Hannibal wore something simple, just a grey toned tuxedo, though replaced his white shirt with a black one.

He thanked the Verrys, who told him they would see him inside. In the foyer of the hall, tables and walls and shelves were covered with all kinds of masks of all kinds of sizes. The art students had made them all.

Hannibal wanted to choose carefully. He scoured every surface, thoroughly impressed and proud of all the designs. There were all kinds of animals, clowns, some painted to look like public figures, some traditional, some authentic. Then, near the back corner on the centre of the table, Hannibal found the one he would purchase.

It was void of any paint but black and hints of silver. A colombina mask, but it was sturdy, to hold the antlers that protruded from the top. When he set it on his face, it felt as if the artist had moulded it around his own face.

Those attending the event were mostly professors, although Hannibal spotted a few sponsors and students mingling in the crowd. For the better part of an hour, Hannibal was occupied with conversation. Parents wanting to thank him for helping their child, coworkers chatting away, women not so subtly dropping hints that they want him to ask them to dance.

"I'm afraid I must have the first dance with my husband, and I have yet to find him," he told them all.

"Sometimes I wonder if he's real," one woman replied, a hand on Hannibal's arm. "I've never met him. Tell me, is that ring on your finger even real?"

"Very real." Hannibal turned to the voice behind him. "I bought the rings myself."

Will wrapped a possessive arm around Hannibal's waist. He wore a volto mask, a brilliant orange with feathers and fluff glued along the edges. The mask was highlighted with beads that caught the light. Will's mask was of a lion. Fitting indeed.

"Well it's a pleasure to meet you." She outstretched her hand. Will took it, though neither intended to be polite to each other. She turned to Hannibal and tilted her head. "I'll leave you to your dance, then."

Glaring at her as she left, Will didn't let go of Hannibal until she was across the room. Hannibal knew long ago that if he and Will were to run off together, Will would have no struggle to apply himself to their fake lives. Never had he imagined he would be so brilliant at it.

He was the perfect example of a loving husband in front of others. He smiled and hung off Hannibal's arm, and was a touch jealous, as newlyweds often were. They would show each other off, gloat each other's fabricated accomplishments. Will was the perfect husband.

Another perk to their arrangement was the physical touch. At home, Will would hardly touch Hannibal, and nor would Hannibal reach out for the sole purpose of touching. It wasn't unexpected by far. All it did was amplify the touch they seeked in public - Will squeezing Hannibal's hand, Hannibal fixing his collar, Will fixing his hair, the grab of a waist or the wrap of an arm.

Hannibal turned to Will and offered his hand. "May I have this dance, darling?"

He could just barely make out the crinkle of Will's eyes in the eye holes of his mask. "Very funny. You know I can't dance."

"You danced at our wedding."

The story they told of their wedding was that it was six months before they were employed as professors. It was a small wedding with only close family and friends, and no photographs. They owned a marriage certificate, fake, of course. Hannibal, or Arthur, rather, was the one proposed to, so he was the one to take the last name of his spouse.

The rings were real. Hannibal wore his around the house, wore it in so it would not look or feel unnatural, whereas Will only wore his at work and events. He would leave it on his work desk in his room until he needed it next.

"Yes, well," grumbled Will, "that was one dance."

"So have just one with me now."

With his mask, Hannibal couldn't read his expression, but the eventual slump of his shoulders told him he had given in. Will took his hand and stepped close, close enough to whisper in his ear.

"I really don't know how to dance."

Hannibal paid his concerns no mind and led him to the floor. "Then follow my lead."

"I have two left feet."

"Nonsense." Guiding Will's hands in position, one in his own hands, one on his shoulder while he held Will's waist, Hannibal started to sway them to the music. "You are as agile as water when you are hunting. This is hardly any different."

Hunting with Will was a majesty to behold. Once their wounds from Dolarhyde had mostly healed, and their broken limbs from the fall had been righted, Hannibal was requested to do some… favours to acquire their new identities and files. He had told Will, who had taken the brunt of the fall in the Atlantic, that he needn’t join him. But he did join him, and Hannibal wasn’t sure why he had given him an out in the first place. They travelled seven different states and killed seven different people - a wealthy conman, a narcissistic politician, a

promiscuous heathen, a jealous ex boyfriend to their client, a woman bigger than a cow, an abuser, and a man who had everything in his life handed to him without so much as a lift of his finger.

All the while they had led Jack Crawford on a wild goose hunt up and down the country, up until they fled without anything left behind to indicate their location. Will was cruel and cunning, clever and criminal. He was beautiful covered in blood and remains, stunning as he slaughtered. There was no hesitation in his action. They hadn't killed since. Hannibal thought it a shame.

"Yeah well, at least I know how to hunt." He held Hannibal's hand a tad too tight. Fumbling, Will positioned himself closer to him to avoid crashing into other people, as if Hannibal would allow that.

Leaning in closer to whisper, in case anyone were to eavesdrop, Hannibal asked, "Surely you went on a prom date in your youth, if you did not dance at your previous wedding."

"Oh, please. I've been shunned in my adult life for my personality disorder, you wouldn't believe the kind of ruthlessness I would get from teenage peers. And, no, Molly wasn't really a dancer either."

As soon as they arrived in Scotland, Will had written Molly a letter. Hannibal had no clue what the contents was, just that there were a few scribbles and crossed out words. Will sent it - a blank envelope, a letter, and his ring. Hannibal had no doubt that everything was in Jack's possession now.

"Well, you're a natural at it."

Will had found a rhythm, stepping back when Hannibal stepped forward. His punishing grip on his hand had softened. Hannibal indulged in admiring him. Sliding a hand over his waist, he warmed at the curve of it, and revelled at the feel of Will's calloused and scarred hands. Hannibal turned them and pushed himself closer, their chests meeting.

Will's heartbeat jackhammered against his. Looking between their bodies, Hannibal was almost surprised he couldn't see it jumping from his chest like in the cartoons. Instead he got an eye full of Will's suit. A blue jacket and pants with a white shirt, no tie. Simple, but it opposed his orange mask and complimented his eyes.

The song started to slow. Will loosened his hold on Hannibal's hand, and delicately dragged it up his sleeve to his shoulder. He rested both of his forearms on Hannibal's shoulders, eyes searching his face, looking, seeking. Hannibal held his other side in turn. Just gently, as if Will would shatter like a teacup.

They said nothing. Will continued to inspect Hannibal, eyes behind his mask darting all around his face. He looked as if he wanted to read his mind. To see inside Hannibal's head, figure out whatever answers he seeked. But Hannibal had no answers, for he did not know the question. Will didn't voice it.

When the song came to completion, others around them drifted off for more champagne or another dance partner. Will and Hannibal were frozen in time. Bodies pressed together, Will's arms around his shoulders, Hannibal's arms around his waist. He wished more than anything to see his face beneath his mask, but before he even had the chance to move Will was gone, not even looking back as he went straight for the closest champagne flute table.

Momentarily stunned, Hannibal followed him with his eyes. Will's back was to him and he pushed his mask away and downed two flutes before disappearing in the crowd.

Hannibal continued to mingle and dance, attempting to avoid becoming distracted. Most conversations were in one ear and out the other - useless chatter and gossip, compliments, planning for future events. Hannibal was as polite as always, he just didn't retain anything he did not find use for. Apart from one conversation, much later on in the night.

Hannibal kept to the corner of the main hall, sipping at a glass and glancing over the heads of the crowd. Just observed, though would not deny that in the back of his mind, he had his eye out for orange feathers and beads matched with blue eyes.

"Looking for the other Mr. Eliason, Arthur?"

Turning to the voice, Hannibal smiled politely. Lillian, a coworker of Will's who worked in the same department, stood before him in a peacock mask. Her accent was thick and her hair was fading from ginger to white.

"It has been a few hours since I have seen him. Not that I'm worried, of course."

"You have no reason to be worried, anyhow, Arthur." Her R's rolled from both her accent and the booze. When Hannibal inclined his head, she continued. "You are the only man in the room to him, judging by the way he looks at you."

"That is very flattering."

"It's the bleeding truth is what it is," she laughed. "Honestly, it gets exhausting sometimes. It's like he can't believe he's married."

Part of Hannibal knew it was true, to her at least. A downfall of Will's flawless cover was that Hannibal often found himself lost in the illusion. Only when they arrived back at their countryside cottage and Will took off his ring and his lovesick facade that Hannibal was reminded. A tough thing it was, to ache. To long for something within reach, but not daring to move to reach for it, in fear it will only distance itself.

With Will's apparent heterosexuality, and their long and twisting history, Hannibal settled for small acts of selfish indulgence, and nothing more.

Nearing midnight, Hannibal found him in the foyer. His neck was craned as he admired all the remaining artwork, a finger in each of the eye holes of his own dangling mask.

"They're rather astonishing, aren't they?" Hannibal said, stepping up beside Will.

If he had looked down from the masks he was cherishing, Hannibal would have seen Will glance over his face. "Yeah. Brilliant."

"Are you ready to head home?"

"Yes. I got a park just outside." He fished out the keys from his pocket. Will handed them over to Hannibal.

Hannibal would have preferred a more elegant car, but living in the countryside required a more practical vessel. The drive was long and quiet. In the corner of his eye, Hannibal noticed Will fiddling with his hands in his lap. Running his fingers over his palm, rubbing his ring.

"Did you enjoy yourself tonight, Will?"

Will let out a long and suffering sigh. "Surprisingly, yes. I'm sure you got a kick out of me stepping on your shoes."

Hannibal smiled at the steering wheel. "I rather enjoyed our dance. Your lapse in confidence is a shame. I would love to teach you more."

"Of course you would," Will huffed. Hannibal decided not to comment.

Rocko came bounding up the driveway to meet them, tail wagging with so much force his body swayed with it. Will dropped to his knees and scratched his ears and jaw while Hannibal started on supper.

They ate together, as they usually did. Will talked and Hannibal listened. He complained that he was struggling to get permission to an actual crime scene to show his students. So far, all they had looked at were photos and fake evidence to practice skills. He wanted to expose them to real situations, show them what they're getting into.

"Half of them won't be able to handle it," Will groaned. "One girl came into class, nearly crying, because she almost hit a cat with her car."

Hannibal hummed. "Perhaps. Although you have always likened to animals more than you have people. She could be the same."

"Maybe that's why I've likened to you more than I have any human," Will muttered.

Hannibal smiled, unbothered. He continued to listen as they finished up their plate. A habit Will had, that he was sure he hadn't even noticed himself, was that he motioned with his hands whilst holding his cutlery. Hannibal's eye caught a glint of metal. Rather than the silverware, he was surprised it had come from the ring still on his finger.

They washed up afterwards, and Hannibal pointedly didn't look at Will's hand. Whatever Will was testing, because he doubted he merely forgot to take it off, Hannibal wouldn't disturb. He still hadn't taken it off when he slunk into his bedroom and shut the door behind him.

Hannibal arrived in his own room, and found himself dreaded to get into bed. He did, nonetheless. The bed was cold on both sides now, and had never felt larger.

In all of Hannibal's life he had never felt the need for a bed companion. He has been in a handful of relationships, some for gain and some for pleasure or interest, but he had never felt lonely. Ironic that he had spent months living with another person in close quarters, and had never felt more lonely than this.

He outstretched his hand. His palm touched nothing but sheets. Taking one of his pillows - not the pillows on the empty side, to keep up some kind of scenario- and tucked it against his body. The pressure was pleasant, even if it didn't move with breath.

Morning came and bled through his dark curtains. Hannibal's hand was fisted in the pillow, cramped. With a heavy breath he got out of bed and followed his usual routine, only to find Will at the kitchen counter nursing a mug of coffee.

"You are not out running." A statement, but a question.

"Nah, I didn't get much sleep last night." He pushed off the bench where he was leaning to give Hannibal the room to start breakfast.

"I apologise for keeping you so late," Hannibal said, though he wasn't really sorry. Whatever had happened last night was enough to convince Will to keep the ring on his finger. It was the small victories that Hannibal counted.

Will waved him dismissively. "No, it was insomnia. Which is strange, I usually get to sleep alright. It's staying asleep that I used to have the issue with."

"Used to?" Hannibal asked, cracking some eggs into a hot pan. "No longer?"

"It's funny. The dreams I had of you have dulled the closer I got to you. Under the same roof-" Will shrugged. "Gone."

Hannibal hummed, then considered his next questions. "And this pleases you or discomforts you?"

Turning, Hannibal plated their breakfast, facing Will now. Will stared at him. A cold, hard glare, up and down. Assessing. His mind worked at a pace and complexity that Hannibal could hardly begin to understand.

"I'm not sure yet," was all he said.

The day went about normally. Hannibal drove them to work, he took his classes, tracked down the student who created the masks he and Will wore to compliment her. At the end of the day Will drove them home and Hannibal cooked dinner while Rocko was jumping outside in the yard.

The week that followed was normal, aside from Will losing more and more sleep and Hannibal falling into bed with a pillow between his arms. Hannibal drove them to school as

he would every day, Will rubbing his hands up and down his own thighs in the corner of his eye.

What made this day abnormal was a teacher bursting into his classroom in the middle of a lecture, claiming there was an emergency surrounding his husband. Hannibal excused himself to his students. Through the halls, he resisted the urge to run so that his coworker could explain the situation. According to him, Will had passed out while standing.

Will's class had been excused from the room, and the man himself sat on his desk while the University nurse packed up their supplies. When his eyes landed on Hannibal, Will rolled his eyes.

Without any further adieu Hannibal cupped his face and damn near wrenched his head to the side.

"For God's sake, Arthur. I passed out and hurt my nose and a finger. I wasn't mauled."

But Hannibal just frowned and dropped his hand. "Well. Pack your things, dear." Will looked as if he were about to argue, so he continued. "You are severely dehydrated, as always, and you have been having a hard time sleeping."

The drive was silent. Hannibal was glad for it, because it meant that Will could nap a little in the car. It may not be ideal rest, but it was something they both got used to while leading Crawford around America with a trail of breadcrumbs. Hannibal would drive for six hours, Will would eat, sleep, stretch so that his bad shoulder wouldn't lock up, and then take over driving while Hannibal would do the same.

Rocko was excited to see them so early. He ran up the driveway to greet them, whining happily. Will rubbed his head and went straight for the kitchen. He placed a coffee mug on the bench and so Hannibal stood in front of him.

"Will-"

"I have work to do," he groaned, "and at the very least I need to make Rocko some more food."

"Let me do it. I've seen you make it a hundred times over, I'm sure I can manage, if you would let me."

There was nothing but truth in that sentence. Will didn't cook for himself, or for Hannibal for that matter. No matter how many times he insisted on those first few weeks, Hannibal refused him. He loved to cook for company, for Will specifically, so he ensured Will knew that it filled him with pride to do so. The only time Will was ever in the kitchen was to make coffee or make Rocko's food. Watching him move around in Hannibal's domain sent a thrill down his spine, so he watched whenever he had the opportunity.

With a heavy sigh, Will ran a hand through his hair and gave him a look with uncalled for suspicion. "Why would you do that?"

"Simply because you need your rest, Will. I assure you I have no ulterior motives."

Will laughed bitterly. "You've never been all that concerned with my health before now."

"That was purely out of my own curiosity. I wanted to see what would happen if a beautiful mind like yours were to break. The result was that it grew back stronger and more brilliant than before." Frowning, Hannibal leaned back against the counter. Rocko nudged at their feet.

Will stepped closer to Hannibal, until they were a mere breath away. "And what of this, Hannibal?" He touched the scar on his forehead. "And this." He lifted his shirt to show off the scar on his stomach. "And all the other countless scars, marks, and wounds you've left with me over the years, physical or not, all to satisfy your own agenda?"

"I had my reasons for those occasions," said Hannibal, eyes fixed on Will's, to his bare stomach, back to his face. "They were justifiable, in my own reasoning. But I no longer wish to torment you, and I cannot think of a purpose for it."

Will rolled his eyes and pushed away, crossing their kitchen and living area. He turned, just slightly over his shoulder, not looking at Hannibal. "Wake me up in an hour."

The doorway was empty, and Hannibal continued to stare there nonetheless. He promised himself to wake Will in three hours.

There were no more work accidents, and for that Hannibal was grateful. Will would have a nap once they got home, work, eat, work, then sleep. Usually they had time to share each other's company and while Hannibal was remorseful to be without it, he appreciated that Will was looking after himself.

"What do you think caused my insomnia?" Will asked over breakfast one morning. It was a Saturday, so the two of them had slept in. A luxury Hannibal wouldn't afford himself in Baltimore, but then again, his bed in Baltimore had not been so cold and depressing.

"It could be a number of things. If you have not been stretching properly, then your wounds may ache. It could be the stress of your job. We are also fugitives, so perhaps your subconscious is reminding you of that fact. Guilt and regret could also be a factor. "

Will seemed to mull this over in his mind. "My shoulder and back don't hurt anymore, and when they do I take pain killers. This is also the least stressful job I've ever had, so that can't be it." He rubbed his stubble, eyes darting, weighing, considering. "Surprisingly the whole on the run thing hasn't been weighing on my conscience. We went through great lengths to get where we are."

"That we did."

With a sigh, he leaned back in his chair. "It's so quiet. That might be my problem."

"That's to be expected. You spent a period with a woman laying in bed next to you, as well as a pack of dogs." Rocko sat at Hannibal's heels under the table, as per usual. He flicked him a

piece of fish. "Have you considered melatonin?"

"Tried it a few years ago. It doesn't work on me." Will collected their plates and began washing them. Hannibal followed, though he just watched and rested his hip against the counter. "I guess I've gotta find a way to manage it."

A thought struck Hannibal. "Perhaps a bedmate would do you good."

Will snickered, forearms covered in soap suds with his sleeves rolled up. "Well, beloved husband, not a lot of people are willing to sleep with a married man. Your implications only include yourself."

"So it does," pondered Hannibal, as if he hadn't considered it.

This was a dangerous game. There were plenty of reasonable explanations they could explore. Polyamory, or an open relationship. An agreement between them, or a roommate turned bed partner. An affair, while would be amusing to play out, would likely end in separation. A divorce would severe them - both Arthur and Eddie Eliason, and Hannibal and Will. They had gone through too much together for separation now.

"You never have been good at keeping boundaries, Hannibal, have you?"

Hannibal swallowed. "Not in regards to you, especially."

And Will laughed, startling Hannibal. Tipped his head back and laughed beautifully. "At least you're honest." He looked at Hannibal, guarded but happy. "Come dry these for me."

Hannibal did as told, plucking up a hand towel and standing next to Will.

"I'm happy living with you, Hannibal. I'm just… not sure I can trust you."

"I understand." The plate clicked when Hannibal tucked it into the cupboard. "In fact it's wise." Click. "But my offer stands. If you find me an unsuitable bed partner, I can help you find an alternative to the solution." Click. Then, he added, "Not another partner. I will not be your wingman."

Will's chuckle sounded through Hannibal's head through the rest of the night.

In the morning, Hannibal scrolled on his tablet, looking for something in particular. There were a few options in colour and size, and it took him another twenty minutes to decide on something. He bidded Will farewell, who didn't look up from his laptop as he waved. His hair was up in a short ponytail to keep from his eyes. Hannibal drove into town and picked up his package. Then, because he couldn't help himself, went out for lunch. On moving to Scotland he had quickly scouted the best cafes and restaurants. Of course he grabbed some things for Will and Rocko as well.

When he returned home, Will was out in the backyard. He threw the ball for Rocko. Rocko was a healthy, young dog. Often he had too much energy for either of them, but he was quite happy to entertain himself. Hannibal leaned against the backdoor frame and watched Will

over arm throw with the arm that Dolarhyde damaged. A perfect, long throw, and Will hardly even winced.

Rocko came sprinting back, straight past Will to Hannibal. Will followed him with his eyes. He subtly lit up when he saw Hannibal. Bending down to reach for the slobbered ball Rocko dropped for him, Hannibal said, "I have something for you, inside."

"Lunch?" Will watched the ball fly through the air, and was almost knocked over by the dog pushing past him.

"And something else."

Will ate lunch first while Hannibal checked to see if any students had emailed him. He was particularly fond of his class, less so the other teachers. He was just looking over one when Will spoke up.

"A weighted blanket?" He held up the blanket, half out of its box.

"Yes. Electric, too. Generally speaking, people are drowsier and more comfortable when their bed isn't cold." He spoke from personal experience.

Will took a deep breath. His brows were furrowed as if the blanket had some kind of hidden pattern or code he could unpack. "Deep pressure stimulation."

"Increases serotonin, melatonin," said Hannibal.

"Decreases cortisol." Will rubbed the fabric.

"A substitute for a partner. It doesn't breathe or move, but it may have the same chemical effect. I hope." Hannibal had picked out a deep navy colour for the blanket, as it matched the rest of Will’s bedding.

Will flashed him that same quizzical look. "You mean it."

"Of course I mean it." Hannibal bristled, only slightly. No one would have noticed but Will.

"Hannibal Lecter," Will stated incredulously, "doing something out of the kindness of his heart."

"If only you bothered to look hard enough, Will Graham, you would see that I spoil you rotten."

Hannibal could grow addicted to Will's laughter. Perhaps he already had. "I know. I see you, Hannibal. Thank you."

Getting into his own bed that night was much more pleasurable knowing that Will was covered in something he had gifted him. His own bed was still as light and cold as the night before. He had bought the blanket as a gift for Will's wellbeing of course, though he did hope it was a catalyst for something.

The following morning, and every morning of the following month, Will was in higher spirits. The deep lines under his eyes had eased and he was less exerted then Rocko coming in through the door after their run. He smiled more, which was the real repayment for Hannibal, not that he would ask for one.

So, Hannibal put a plan into motion. It started with a simple touch - a brush on the shoulder when asking if he wants some more dessert. Will didn't react, which is what Hannibal suspected. Over the next few weeks he touched more. Always appropriately, if boldly. Fixing his button, standing and sitting closer, stretching his palm over the expanse of Will's back.

It took a few more weeks for Will to start drawing into himself again. He wasn't uncomfortable - that was the very last thing Hannibal wished for, and made care not to push too far. But Will pulled his knees to his chest when sitting, held his shoulders in front of the fire.

One morning at the University, Hannibal gave his students a quiz. Up to date with his own work, he went for a stroll. He didn't often make his way across the campus. He found the exception to make his way into Will's classroom.

"Mr Eliason," he said, without hiding his irritation.

"Hello Mr Eliason." Hannibal smiled and approached his desk. It was honestly a hazard, Will's desk. Papers strewn everywhere, an untouched sandwich, three empty mugs, stacks of files. "Came in to say hello."

"Yes, well, hello to you too."

Hannibal sat in his chair while Will paced around. He was, as always, overwhelmingly intelligent. It awed him that Will could so effortlessly relay part of his mind onto students. They would have the greatest advantage in Hannibal's opinion. They all have an insight, even if a small one, to the greatest mind Hannibal had ever come across.

"Here's some photos of a case from three years ago, in New Jersey." Will clicked a button and the projected slide flicked to a few images of a woman in a puddle of her own blood. "You have fifteen minutes to write what you think was the cause of death, approximate time of death, and to note the piece of evidence that has yet to be marked in the second picture."

Once the students all put pen to paper, Will leaned on the arm of his chair, over Hannibal. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Just enjoying the company of my husband," whispered Hannibal. He held Will's wrist and ran his hand up his arm.

"You're a distraction."

"That's very flattering."

"To the students," Will hissed through his teeth. He looked around, then leaned closer to mutter. "Some of them have already tried to pry into my personal life, you're making the

situation more difficult."

Hannibal flashed him a smile. "Then how about I play your game? If you can find a spare piece of paper and a pen in this disaster of a workspace."

Looking dead into Hannibal's eyes, Will fished under his busy papers and found a clean sheet, as well as a black pen. He slammed them on the desk in front of Hannibal and backed off to walk through the rows. Hannibal swivelled in the chair to inspect the photographs. He made notes, although the scene was ugly. He could certainly do a better job of the death of this woman.

When time was up, Will clapped his hands and pointed to a random student. "Share with the class."

"Victim was killed within 24 hours of discovery," he said, "she was beaten to death with a weapon, judging from the broken bones and blood."

"By whom was she killed?"

The student shrugged. Another spoke up. "Possibly she saw something she shouldn't have? Gang activity, a drug deal."

"Alright. Any other ideas?"

A long silence. Then, "I think she died three hours before finding her. Whoever did this, it was someone she knew."

"Close," praised Will, "but not quite. Mr. Eliason, since you're insistent on joining my class, please. Share with everyone else what you wrote down."

Hannibal looked at his notes. A few scribbles and a quick sketch of Will, featuring the hard lines of his back. "Victim died three to five hours before discovery. No sign of struggle, so she couldn't have died from the trauma to her ribs and head, unless she wanted to die. The beating was done with something heavy, my guess is a metal baseball bat or a pole. It was also done post mortem."

The students sighed and looked at each other, murmuring and whispering to each other. Will just glowered at him. "Impressive. Can you tell me what killed her?"

Hannibal looked at his notes, then up at the photographs. He shook his head. "Perhaps if I had been there at the time of investigation."

Will grinned, vile and victorious. He strutted back to the desk and spun the chair so Hannibal, as well as the rest of the class, faced the photographs.

"The victim was killed three hours or sooner before discovery. You can tell by the way the puddle of blood increases by a few centimetres from the first to last photos. She has skin and blood under her fingernails probably when she clawed at the person who choked her." Will flicked to the next slide. It was a close up of the woman's neck and there were light, although

visible, red splotches. "The damage to her body after she lost consciousness was an emotional outburst from the killer. Likely, they were mad that they had killed this woman."

"Impressive," Hannibal remarked. He stood, adjusted his jacket. Hannibal clasped Will's shoulders, brushing them down his arms all the way to his hands. Will still wore the ring, even after hours. "Although you always are rather attentive, aren't you?"

"Physical displays of affection are inappropriate in the workplace and in front of students."

"Quite." Hannibal dropped his hands. "I will see you later then, Mr. Eliason."

"I will see you outside in five minutes," Will said, voice low and with no room for argument.

"Then I will see you then." Just as he was about to leave, Hannibal addressed the class. "Do take care of my husband, students. And if you don't like his class, don't fake interest. He will know."

The door hardly closed when Will burst through them and shoved Hannibal against the wall. "I know what you're doing."

"And what is it that I'm doing?" Hannibal found himself breathless. Will had a firm hand against his chest and his face was close. A primal kind of intimidation, causing problematic primal feelings in Hannibal's gut.

"You're manipulating me because you want a physical relationship. What for? To lure me into a false sense of security? What are you planning in that complicated palace in your head?"

"You occupy many rooms of my palace." It had been too many months since Hannibal had seen the red hot anger in those eyes. He missed them. "Because of that, I have no reason to harm you. Those rooms would be lonely without you."

"So what's your motive? You always have some self serving motive for your actions." He pressed his hand harder into Hannibal's chest.

"I did not lie to you when I said I was concerned about your wellbeing. I only failed to reveal that I thought of my own."

Will inspected him for a moment, before a wide grin spread across his face. He tilted his head almost mockingly. "You're lonely."

Hannibal clenched his jaw. "Let us continue this conversation at home. We both have classes to attend to."

"Strike a nerve, did I?" Will said as he pushed himself away, and didn't wait for an answer before slinking away back into his class.

They did not continue the conversation at home. They spent the afternoon circling each other, not speaking, not touching. At dinner, Hannibal crossed that barrier.

"So. I may not have been completely clear on my intentions."

Will exhaled abruptly. "That's one way to put it. But before you start with some pretentious, metaphorical bullshit about why you're right and I'm dramatic, I want you to speak truthfully and bluntly."

With a sigh, Hannibal continued. "I believed that sharing a bed together would benefit the both of us. Company during sleep often boosts serotonin levels better than any blanket."

"And you decided to try and subtly manipulate me into folding, into believing it was my idea and approach you with a proposal?" There was a bite to his tone that Hannibal didn't appreciate.

"I reject the term 'manipulate', that tends to bring up negative connotations."

"But your plan had no negative intentions at all?" Will clearly didn't believe the words he was saying. "So you had absolutely no intention of getting me soft and trusting and vulnerable, just to strike when I least expected it?"

Hannibal felt as if he had been doused in cold water. "I admit to being harsh with you in our past, but I had assumed that the past was where we left that."

"When the scars you left me run so deep in my skin, and now you're living under the same roof, it's kind of hard for them not to start itching." Will pushed his plate away, half eaten. He rested his eyes in the palm of his hand.

"You asked me to be blunt and honest, but I feel as if I am not receiving the same courtesy," Hannibal said, doing his best not to grumble.

With a heavy sigh, Will pushed himself to sit straight. His jaw clenched once. Twice. "I find it hard to trust you, Hannibal. Not because of the things you have done. Things that I believed to be immature, cruel, brutal and upsetting at the time, I now see your reasoning for. Despite how broken I was, and still am, watching Abigail die, I understand why you did it."

"So why does your trust falter?"

"Because of what I did." Will turned his head to the side, staring at a painting on the wall that Hannibal had bought at the University. He looked back at Hannibal. "I threw us off a ledge and tried to kill us both. Was disappointed when we didn't die, as well. Then every day of recovery I thought about killing us both again."

Hannibal's eyebrows drew in and he frowned. "You had made the assumption that I would seek revenge."

"You always do," Will laughed, sadly and bitterly. "I pull your ponytail, you pull mine. Your drive is karma. People get as they're given, as they deserve, in your eyes."

"You and I are not so different, in that regard." Hannibal pushed his plate away as well, in favour of putting his locked hands on the table. "But it has been over a year now, Will."

"And how long did you wait to kill Frederick Chilton, before Lass and Dolarhyde beat you to the jump? Miriam Lass, Margot Verger, her son. You are calculating before you are

impulsive. I was simply waiting for the turnover."

Mulling over the words, Hannibal hummed. "All of your reasoning should be enough to convince you not to trust me. But you said you were uncertain."

Will scrubbed through his hair. "Yes, there is one reason that I think you may be genuine."

"Tell it to me, will you please?"

"One of the last conversations I had with Bedelia, she said that you were in love with me."

"Ah." Hannibal suddenly found it difficult to hold eye contact. "Yes, well. I am surprised you hadn't noticed it sooner, as an empath."

"I found it confusing when every act of kindness and love was done with equal amounts of cruelty." He didn't look angry anymore. Just tired. "You would make me breakfast made of people. You compared us to Achillies and Patroclus and cast yourself as the one who survived. You save me from the Verger Estate, carrying me in your arms while you're injured, and then turn yourself in, knowing it would torment me because I can't live without you."

The silence stretched over them. Hannibal didn't look up at Will's face. He could tell by his voice that he had a heartbroken, dishevelled expression that would be too much for him. Instead he watched his hands. Will rubbed his fingers, interlocked them, fiddled with the ring.

"So yeah," Will continued, "it was pretty hard to tell that you were in love with me. Love usually doesn't involve so much bloodshed."

Hannibal smiled weakly. "We aren't usual people, Will, that much is true. My curiosity grew into admiration, and that grew into love. I wanted to break you to see what would happen, and then mould you into what I wanted. But you aren't fragile, or malleable. You are beautiful and
intelligent, empathetic and cruel. You are the perfect balance of all things, Will. I only harmed you because I wanted to see you, and I wanted to trust you. Now that I have both I have no reason to do so."

"You trust me? Why?"

"Dolarhyde was a necessary death. The seven who followed, before making our way across the ocean, were not. There were hundreds of opportunities for you to betray me, to turn tail. You could have gotten off the hook with a good lawyer, which the FBI would provide. You could have gone back to your comfortable life. But you didn't. And you don't regret your choice."

"No," Will whispered. "I don't regret anything."

Everything was out in the open now. A burden had lifted off Hannibal's shoulders, but a new one settled in his chest. The table had never seemed longer and their food had grown cold. He was reminded of his freezing d bed, perfect and clean, untainted by an unfamiliar body, and no opportunities for that body to grow familiar next to him.

"My offer stands, just so you know," said Hannibal. He always wanted to fill the silence. "If you deem myself trustworthy, and you are willing to try, then so am I. Feel free to let yourself in."

Will stared at him. Then, with a loud clutter of plates and cutlery and the table, he jumped up and swiped their dishes off the table and moved to the kitchen. He didn't say a word the rest of the night.

Hannibal considered getting himself one of those blankets. Maybe then his bed would seem smaller, more inviting. He took his time getting undressed and into bed, perhaps to prolong being out of it. The icy sheets made him shiver as he slid beneath the covers. He slept on the side closest to the door. Old habits die hard.

In the middle of the night, he woke to some activity in the house. Hannibal knew it was Will - he could recognise that grumbling and swearing from anywhere. There was a thump and then a curse. He was just about to call out to him when Will kicked open his door, his blanket bundled in his arms.

"If you say a thing, Hannibal," he warned, flicking back Hannibal's blanket to dump his own on top, "I will strangle you in your sleep."

Hannibal tucked the blanket to cover him on his side. He wouldn't tuck it into the mattress just yet. He had learnt now that Will would push the boundaries at his own pace, and Hannibal would watch it unfold.

"There's a plug on your side, if you wish to plug it in," Hannibal whispered. He lay on his back, the blanket pressing all along his front.

Will lay on his stomach, his head facing away from Hannibal. He sighed. "Tomorrow night."

Hannibal smiled up at the ceiling.

The following morning, the first thing he noticed was that the bed was empty. The heavy blanket was still draped across him, cosy and thick. Beside Hannibal, the bed was warm and wrinkled, the pillow imperfect and the blanket haphazardly straightened. It caused his chest to flutter.

Neither of them said a word about it. The day went about boringly normal. Hannibal spent most of the afternoon helping their neighbour, a shepherd, with his shed. Winter was approaching at alarming speeds and his shed had collapsed a few weeks ago in a storm. The shepherd was kind and old, and surprisingly sharp. He loved to chat, which distracted Hannibal from thinking about Will.

Hannibal served salmon for dinner. It was delicious, even if he said so himself, though the purpose of the dish was to please Will somehow or rather. Of course, Will picked up on this. He enjoyed the dinner, but still kept his physical distance.

Once Hannibal completed marking his quizz papers, he retired to his room. He found Will already there, under the blanket with a book in hand. Hannibal could hear a faint hum of the

electric blanket. He stripped shamelessly from his clothes and into a pair of comfortable pants. After he crawled beside Will, the lamp he used as light was turned off.

As pleasant as it was sleeping next to Will, or attempting to, there was a pressing issue. For Will, it seemed impossible to stay still for more than five minutes. He tossed and turned and tumbled around, on his back, on his front, on his side, facing Hannibal, facing away. He ended up on his back and Hannibal thought he would finally slip to sleep, but then Will started to shift again. Before he had the chance to move, though, Hannibal rested his hand on Will's chest, stopping him. Will sighed in his sleep. He didn't move for the rest of the night.

He woke alone the next morning again, his hand where Will's chest would be, had he not snuck off early in the morning. Brown eyes peeked over the blanket at him.

"Rocko," Hannibal groaned. "Out."

Rocko whined but trotted out of the room.

He found Will in the kitchen, a forgotten mug of coffee next to him while he peered at his laptop. Will's eyes darted to Hannibal when he entered the room, then back to the screen. "Morning."

"Good morning." Starting on breakfast, Hannibal rolled his sleeves up. He had finally perfected the proportions when cooking for the two of them. Enough to sustain and satisfy, and not too much for leftovers.

"You touched me last night." Will didn't look up still. His fingers flew over the keyboard. "That wasn't part of the deal."

"I wasn't aware there was a deal. You told me if I brought it up you would strangle me in my sleep. I don't take threats from killers lightly."

"So instead you just touch me in my sleep?" He clicked furiously, then slammed his laptop shut.

"You tossed and turned all night. If I hadn't settled you, you would have rolled right off the bed," Hannibal sighed.

He had no intentions other than physical closeness. Even with that, Hannibal knew he was pushing. There were plenty of things he wanted, wished for, and dreamt of. Things he had resigned as just that - a dream. He was fortunate enough that Will had allowed this much.

Will carded a hand through his hair and let out a long breath. "Yeah. I can't control it, though."

Hannibal could see where this was going. An apology, maybe, but definitely a retreat. Before Will could get a word out, he said, "What did your previous partners do to resolve this problem?"

"Mostly, they would sleep on top of me." He used the flat of his hands to demonstrate. "Anchor me down."

"We can try that, if you'd like. I can assure you I won't touch you inappropriately in your sleep, as there are boundaries that even I refuse to cross. If you trust me enough, that is."

Will regarded him. "I trust you, Hannibal. I trust that I know you, and now I know that if you plan to hurt me, you'll tell me. Or make it so blatantly obvious that you're basically telling me."

Nodding, Hannibal agreed. He was right, of course. While he made no plans to ever harm Will again, even if it cost him his life, he would tell him of all and every of his plans. But… "What changed your mind? You are always so careful."

"Because you love beautiful things, Hannibal. To you, I am the most beautiful thing you have ever come across or created." Will leaned across the bench on his elbows. A small sign of confidence. "The fact that I see you for who you are, and appreciate all parts of you, is irreplaceable. To hurt me would only hurt yourself more than it ever would me."

He stood and stepped in front of Hannibal, slow, teasing. Just as he leaned into his ear, Will whispered, "I have everything you want."

Only when he stepped away did Hannibal's breath return to him. Will pushed away, a triumphant grin on his face. Hannibal moved when he smelt breakfast burning.

If Hannibal was strapped to several machines and asked if he was looking forward to bed that night and he said he wasn't, the machine would say that he was telling the truth. That was, however, because Hannibal had mastered lying down to a scientific and medical level. He was practically ecstatic. He counted down every hour like he was a teenager waiting on a date.

Hannibal wrapped up his last class at five o'clock. He stayed another half hour to look over a few papers, checking the clock every ten minutes. Someone barged into his room and Hannibal was most displeased to find it wasn't Will.

"Mr. Eliason! Please take my evening class!" It was someone in Hannibal's department, so irrelevant he hadn't bothered to remember his name. "My students are doing papers on the Roman Empire and you're the most qualified to take over, please!"

"What reason could you-"

"My wife's in labour, and I know you have a husband not a wife, but as a husband, please know that I have to be there for her."

Hannibal watched him clutching at the door, clearly holding himself back from making a break for it. He looked at the clock. 5:33. Hannibal sighed. "Very well."

"Thank you!" The man launched his classroom keys across the room. "Class starts at seven!"

Hannibal caught the keys and looked at the clock again. The hands hadn't changed.

Calling Will, Hannibal locked up his classroom and made his way to the class with the same number as on the keys. It rang four times before he picked up.

"Hello?"

"I apologise, I will not be home to cook dinner." He cringed at the sight of the desk. Messy, with books, papers, and uneaten food.

Will sounded more interested now. "Why, what's wrong?"

"A man in my department decided it was a good day to go to work, the same day his wife was scheduled to have their child. The predictable happened." Will didn't say anything on the other line. "Stop chewing your fingernails."

Will scoffed. "When's the class?"

"Seven." Hannibal looked at the clock. 5:38. "You needn't cook me any food, I'll find dinner at the cafeteria."

With that, Will laughed. "You hate the cafeteria food. That's why you pack your own lunch."

"Yes, the food is ghastly. I don't understand how you can eat it."

"Well everyone seems to think that I make your lunches, you know," Will huffed.

"Oh dear," Hannibal murmured, "it appears I've framed you as a perfect and loving husband."

Will hummed to hide his laughter. "Your most heinous crime yet. I've been wanting to try that new place in town. And I know you despise take out, but we're trapped here so we don't have a choice."

Halting unpacking his things on the disgusting desk, Hannibal bit his cheek. "You aren't going home?"

"No?" He asked like it was stupid question. "How would you get home?"

"I could catch a cab."

"Yeah and it'll cost about four hundred bucks."

"An exaggeration, but it isn't like we are without the money."

With a breath of laughter, Will said, "So much so that it scares me sometimes."

Both of them were silent for a time. Hannibal could just hear the faint breathing on the other end. Then, he broke it. "You would really wait? It will be over two hours."

"Just tell me whether you want dinner before or after your last class," Will sighed.

With a smile that he hoped he could hear, Hannibal said, "Before."

"I'll be over soon." He hung up.

Hannibal busied himself with clearing the desk. He would never complain about Will's desk, after this. Will came in half an hour later and sat on the desk to the side of him. Chinese cuisine was something Hannibal was fond of. Surprisingly, he was pleased with the result, though the vegetables could have been a day fresher. Even if he would prefer it on dinner plates in their own home, rather than on plastic containers in someone else's classroom that has only one desk chair. Though, Hannibal liked the view.

Will ate quicker than normal, lounged back against the desk, hair and clothes ruffled after a long day and a walk in the wind. Upon living together, Hannibal soon realised that Will was a peculiar eater. He would either eat abnormally fast or worryingly slow. It was details like these that Hannibal loved. Not because of the new findings themselves, but that he had the opportunity to learn them, memorise them.

"So what's your next class on?" Will finished his food and planted his palms on the desk behind him. He leaned back enough to crack his lower back. Hannibal almost thought he was being flirtatious.

"The Romans."

"Ahh. And you're a sucker for history."

"You know me so well."

Will smiled down at him. "You're dreading this class."

"Of course I am," huffed Hannibal. "I was asked to teach a class with no preparation or warning. I'm not a greedy man, though I do prefer to be paid for my work. Worst of all he is depriving me of my evening with you."

Will nudged his foot. "Not completely. I'll sit to the side of my class and finish my night's work. Then I'll take you home."

If Hannibal were a less controlled man, he would have blushed. "I appreciate the offer but I fear you'll be a distraction."

"Oh?" That was definitely flirtatious. "A distraction? To your students that aren't really your students?"

Will grabbed the chair behind Hannibal's head. His forearm flexed, and a vein protruded from under his sleeve. Instinctively Hannibal widened his legs, only to have Will step around them, bracketing Hannibal's knees with his own.

"No," he admitted, reaching out to touch. Hannibal only had the courage to finger at his jacket. "You would be a distraction to me."

The door flung open and they both turned. A student, now hesitant, stood in the doorway. "Uh. Am I… am I in the right room?"

Hannibal took one look at Will and knew this was over by the smart look on his face. "Yes. I was just leaving."

The student pointedly didn't look at them while Will took their rubbish with him. And, because he wouldn't be Will Graham if he wasn't determined on making Hannibal's brain run, he drew a line across Hannibal's shoulders as he walked past. Hannibal shivered.

The class was more painful than he imagined. Not because of Will's teasing. No, he wasn't spared even a single thought of Will. It had turned out that their regular teacher was behind on lessons by about a week. Hannibal had two options. One was to help these aspiring youths, improve their grades and their confidence. The second option was to lay back and leave them to their own dependence. Being the man that he is, Hannibal chose the former.

So his hour lesson was compact of three hours of material. The students were tired by the end, although incredibly grateful and were very clear on that fact. It saddened Hannibal that such a large class had to suffer an incompetent teacher, but not so much he was willing to give up his evenings regularly.

Will sauntered in when the clock read 8:06 and all the students had evacuated. He dangled the car keys from his fingers. "Ready to go home, dear old husband?"

The tension in Hannibal's shoulders eased with a sigh. "Very ready."

Will was exponentially patient on the drive home as Hannibal groaned about the terrible coworker he had to cover. He smiled at the road, clearly listening, amused by his rambles.

"What's got you so happy, Will?"

He shrugged. "Just reminds me of my days at the police academy. My first term I was taught by this pig - excuse the pun - and I never learnt anything."

He was always stunning in the moonlight. Hannibal always thought so, and now was no different. The light reflected off the tarmac and the hood of the car. It highlighted the scars on Will's face. For Eddie Eliason, the scars were from a hunting accident when he was young. For Will Graham, they were Hannibal's.

"It makes you feel good that you can be good to your students. You love the feeling of giving back," Hannibal said, so low, as if anything more than a whisper would disturb the peace on Will's face.

"I love helping good people just as much as I love torturing cruel people. Although," he said, turning to Hannibal to make sure he got a perfect view of his grin, "you must find it as funny as I do. I teach how to find and identify killers. Some days I just list symptoms and motives of our own psychology."

Hannibal returned the smile. "You are truly a magnificent evil."

To which Will laughed.

They reached home by nine o'clock and Will let Rocko out the back for a quick run around. Hannibal brandished two glasses and filled them with wine, offering it to him when he came back inside. He got a slow fire going and Will sat on the rug in front of it.

Hannibal desperately wanted to ask about the ring. The item was more prominent than ever with the licks of flame reflected off it. Will stared into the fire. His mind, however, was elsewhere.

Finally, he turned to Hannibal, sitting in a chair next to him. "Do you think Jack's still looking for us?"

"You ask a question you know the answer to."

Will turned back to the fire. "I wanted your opinion."

His blue eyes were nearly white in the firelight. Hannibal slipped down from his chair, careful of his wine, and sat with his legs under him on the rug. "Jack Crawford has likely figured out we are no longer in the country. That won't stop him, however, and I harbour no doubt he is doing whatever he can in his power to find us."

"He won't."

"He would need you to do that." Hannibal tipped his head to the side. Will's profile lightened and his smile was as warm as the fire.

"Mason found you last time, remember?"

"Yes, well." He took a sip of his wine. "You have made sure my spending stays in check. Not that I need as many fine things with you here." Hannibal let the implications hang between them.

Will sighed. "I'm assuming you have been keeping track of news of us on Tattlecrime?"

"The only news of us was the national news we would listen to on the radio, back in America. Miss Lounds deleted all of her reports on us after the end of my incarceration." Hannibal thread his fingers through the rug, petting it until Rocko laid in front of him, jealous.

"Miss Lounds must have realised she may be on the menu," Will said around the rim of his glass. He downed the rest of it.

Humming, Hannibal stood and took Will's glass to fill it and his own again. "It is a shame that the last seven we were unable to make into a meal."

"Leaving the organs intact was part of our deals. If we had taken even a spleen then our documents wouldn't appear as legitimate." Will scratched Rocko's ears in his absence, and rubbed down his forehead.

"A shame nonetheless. They did not deserve to become the beauty we created them to be." Handing over Will's glass, Hannibal sat back beside him. He ran a hand down the dog's back, smooth and hot in front of the fire.

Will swallowed audibly. "Have you killed since we moved?"

"Not once," Hannibal promised. "Have you?"

Will shook his head. "You want to, though."

It wasn't a question.

Hannibal answered anyway. "Yes. It is a part of who I am, you know this as well as I do. I am, however, wary of rousing suspicion. If I were to do it, I doubt it would be clever to do so within Scotland."

"When you do, I want you to give me the details. To tell me why this person deserved to die. I will help you with the body, regardless, but if the punishment fits the crime then I will gladly participate in the punishment."

"Then I offer the same. Although, you needn't give me reasons." Hannibal swirled the wine in his glass. "I trust your reasoning, even if you do not see my own. I do not take offence just so you know."

Will hummed. He sipped at his wine.

"Are you worried, Will?"

"Not at all. I just find comfort in being on the same page."

They finished their wine just as the fire died down to embers. Rocko snored soundly. Hannibal took their glasses to the kitchen while Will disappeared to the bathroom. The night was cloudy and cold outside of their walls. Beyond their property there were plains of fields and trees and a small town about ten minutes away. All of this was theirs. Not Hannibal's and not Will's, but theirs to share and indulge.

He found Will in his bed, stretching his shoulders.

"Are you still keen to try out what we had planned?" Hannibal stripped from his tie and jacket.

"Yep." He made no move to get up or shift.

Once Hannibal had changed his attire, he sunk his knee on the bed. "Shuffle along, then."

"What?" Will stared. "No, you're laying on me, I'm not laying on you."

"I… had presumed the opposite. You are lighter than I am in weight, it only seemed the logical option." Hannibal settled back on his haunches.

"What are you, shy?" prodded Will. "I've had heavier partners than you before."

"I'm just worried about your ability to breathe." Hannibal still hesitated. Eventually, Will grew tired of waiting and flicked the lamp off. He settled onto his back and sighed.

Hannibal sat there a moment, considering his options. He caved. Gentle as he could, he pulled the blankets up and felt for Will. Hannibal brushed his stomach and up his chest, only for Will to snatch his wrist and pull him across. Hannibal laughed a little as he fell and

shuffled down so they weren't breathing on each other. With his head on Will's chest and an arm and a leg draped over his body, Hannibal closed his eyes.

"Hannibal?" He could tell Will was drifting. His voice was slow and soft and his body beneath him more relaxed than he often was.

"Yes, Will?" Hannibal wasn't far behind him.

"Relax." As he said it, Will drew his fingers down Hannibal's back, light as a feather. Hannibal hadn't even noticed the tension there until the touch, when he turned into a puddle. He didn't remember anything else before he fell asleep.

He woke to Will shuffling out from under him. Hannibal was overcome with the need to pull him back under him. Resisting the urge, he instead pretended to be half asleep and rolled off of him. Will tiptoed out of the room. Hannibal smiled into his pillow, warm and smelling of hair and God-awful aftershave. He laid there for another twenty minutes, basking in the fact that his bed was untidy and rumpled.

In which was incorporated into their routine. Hannibal woke up alone, made breakfast and drove them to work, touching and holding hands over the centre console, just so that they would be touching. At the end of the day Will would drive them home and similar happenings occurred. They spent their evenings together by the fire now that it was growing cold. Often, they didn't speak. Too caught up in their work to catch the others attention, but they would sit close enough their knees would touch, close enough to reach. Then they would retire to bed and Hannibal would sleep on top always, then wake up alone and the routine would start over.

At night, Hannibal stayed awake as long as he could. Most nights his ear was pressed to Will's chest. Listening to his heart beat against his ribs. Years ago, he wanted to eat his brain. It was fitting for such an incredibly intelligent man. Now, though, he wanted to eat his heart. Will had already consumed his own, so fair was fair.

He liked to rub his fingers through the grooves of Will's ribs. In his sleep, Will would shudder, tickled. His arms around Hannibal would tighten and his head would turn. They were strong arms, and the legs under Hannibal's were just as powerful from all the running. He wished to be able to map out every muscle on his body, touch and squeeze like he was checking for ripe fruit. But he never did. Wouldn't cross that barrier until given permission. If given permission.

Hannibal loved routines. He loved their relationship, the touches throughout the day. He loved Will, most of all, but he didn't say it.

"I managed to find a station that will allow my class to see a crime scene," Will said over dinner one night. The fire was roaring as it had snowed earlier, and it cast light all around the room.

"Congratulations. Is a glass of celebratory wine in order?" Hannibal was already standing to get up.

"That wasn't my intention, but you know I won’t say no.” With a laugh, Hannibal poured generously. They toasted, tasted, before Will continued. “I asked them to email me immediately when there was a case with a body. A presumed suicide, a murder, an accident.”

“You want to show your students the worst of the worst,” Hannibal accused.

“I can prepare them for burglaries and mundane cases like that in class. The only person that can prepare them for a dead body is the students themselves.”

Hannibal hummed. He had never been bothered by bodies. A person was a person, whether they were dead or not never disturbed him. In fact, a dead body had more potential for beauty, Hannibal found.

"Which station have you aligned yourself with?"

Will paused, the wine glass halfway to his mouth. "Mountjoy Garda Station."

Raising his eyebrows, Hannibal waited, possibly for an amendment or a punchline. "In Dublin?"

"We'll catch a plane the morning I get the email. We'll stay in a hotel for a night or two, giving them plenty of time to see the scene, the body, and how professionals work. It might take longer for me to convince them to give me a copy of the files."

"Certainly." Hannibal returned to cutting into his food, even if he wasn't all that hungry anymore.

"Hannibal." He raised his eyebrows as a response. "It'll be the longest we've been apart for over a year."

They caught each other's eyes across the table. Will's face was perfectly neutral. Not even the twitch of an eyebrow or a clench of his jaw.

"Yes. It will be." Hannibal was the first to break eye contact. "No matter. We went three years without seeing each other, after all."

"That was different," said Will immediately. He looked away as well, staring into the fire. They both remembered the night well. The blood in the snow, the headlights of Crawford's car. Hannibal could almost see his breath in front of him again. Will looked at him again, and his face wasn't blank anymore, but genuine. "I pushed you away, then. I'm done pushing you away."

Will got an email less than a week later. Hannibal helped him rush around the house packing and gathering his files and identification. The school funded plane tickets and hotel rooms for Will and the students.

Hannibal dropped him off there and found himself hesitant to get out of the car. Only when Will sighed and got out did he follow.

They stood across from each other, close, but not quite touching. Neither said anything, but the words left unspoken were heard and understood. In typical situations, a husband would kiss his husband goodbye. His students were half looking.

Instead, Will surprised Hannibal by wrapping his arms around his shoulders and pulling him into a hug. After a beat, Hannibal snaked around his waist. They crushed closer to each other and he was reminded of the previous night as they huddled for warmth, the electric blanket having been on for an hour. Hannibal took a deep breath, breathing in the smell of his hair as if he couldn't smell it in the pillow later.

Will pulled back first, but only enough to cup Hannibal's face. His hands were red and icy. Hannibal leaned into them like he needed them to hold himself together.

"It's just a couple of nights. I'll call you tonight." He brushed his fingers over Hannibal's cheekbones. "I made enough food for Rocko to last. Make sure-"

Hannibal laughed and nodded. "I will look after our dog just fine. So long as you look after yourself."

"I will. I better go, before I miss the flight."

"Yes. You mustn't miss it." Neither made a move. Then, after a deep breath, Will pushed himself onto the tips of his shoes and kissed Hannibal's forehead. The feverish heat and colour that bloomed on his face was likely the reason for Will's smile.

"I'll call," Will repeated. Hannibal nodded, words lost to him. He didn't get back into the car until the plane had departed.

It only really hit him when he was heading home. Hannibal didn't have to wait those extra few minutes for Will to pack up his things before getting into the car. The car ride was silent. Rocko whined, confused, so Hannibal rubbed his fur.

The house was even more silent. Will wasn't loud, not by far. In fact they spent most of their afternoons in the quiet as they worked. That was companionable, however, rather than lonely.

Hannibal cooked too much food that first night, too used to cooking for company now. To distract himself from the empty home, Hannibal filled out his class planning booklet for the rest of the semester, aligned PowerPoints and documents. He responded to emails from the students in the class he substituted in, as he had since.

Looking at the time, he almost flinched to see it was past midnight. Hannibal drew his bottom lip between his teeth and sighed, shutting the lid to his laptop. He hadn't been in the bedroom since the morning. To prolong it even longer, Hannibal made himself a hot chocolate drink in the low light of the fire.

His phone started to vibrate and he answered it before it had finished its first ring.

"Hey, sorry," Will whispered through the phone, "my day has been crazy. Did I wake you?"

"Not at all. I was just about to head to bed, so you caught me just in time." Hannibal stirred the teaspoon in his mug maybe a dozen too many times.

Will sighed. "It's weird being this far apart. But maybe it's good for us, so we don't grow too codependent on each other."

"I believe we are far beyond hope of a lack of codependency."

"I guess that's true."

"How did the students react to the crime scene?" Hannibal asked, diverting the conversation elsewhere.

"Good, mostly. Nobody threw up, but we still have to visit the morgue tomorrow, so we'll see. I think they learnt a lot today."

When Hannibal spoke next, he did so lowly, in case anyone was eavesdropping on Will's end. "You must be careful. If you create students so excellent they may find a killer close to them."

"I know. And I am careful. I guess I'm just lucky the photo they used of me was my drivers licence when I got it at eighteen." Hannibal knew the photo well. Their photos side by side made them look like a pair of teenage hooligans rather than middle aged murderers.

"If it's any consolation, you look much more different now."

Will huffed a quiet laugh. "Yeah that's one way to put it. Teenage me didn't have as many facial scars and I had no hope of putting my hair up like I do now."

"Long hair suits you rather well," Hannibal commented. "As do the scars."

"You certainly look more real than you did in that photo."

Hannibal tried to hide the smile from his voice. "Implying I appeared fake?"

"Sometimes you looked like a doll. With your hair swept back and your suit so perfect."

"Your words sound like compliments but your tone suggests otherwise," Hannibal humours.

Will laughed. "I prefer you visually when you're imperfect. It reminds me you're real, and not a hallucination."

Words spilled from Hannibal's mouth before he had the chance to think. "Like when I'm asleep in the mornings, when you get up before me?"

Silence, on the other end.

"Yeah."

More silence. Hannibal checked to make sure he hadn't hung up on accident.

Will sighed, again. "Speaking of bed, we should probably sleep soon. We both have to get up early tomorrow."

"Good idea."

"Call me between classes?" Will asked, after a moment's breath.

"Of course. Goodnight, Will." Hannibal finished what was left in his mug.

"Goodnight."

The call ended. Hannibal rinsed his mug and scratched a sleeping Rocko's forehead. The dog sighed pleasantly.

The bedroom was, expectantly, cold. The door had been closed so the heat of the fire hadn't reached it. Hannibal changed slowly, dragging the moment on for as long as possible. Eventually he had to get in, and he was no happier about it.

The sheets were freezing and tidy. The smell of Will in them wasn't comforting as Hannibal thought they might be, but made the hole in his chest crumble significantly more. After tossing, then turning, on his side then on his back, Hannibal fisted the opposite pillow and lay on top of it.

Hannibal wasn't sure when he drifted off to sleep, but from the ache in his eyelids it certainly was early. The day went on as the previous had, with significantly more snow. At midday he dialled Will's number.

"Hey." Will sounded as tired as Hannibal felt.

"Happy morgue day. How has it been?"

The groan from Will said enough. "Just finished talking to paramedics. One student threw up three times before passing out. Which means more paperwork to fill out."

"Will it prolong your trip?"

"It shouldn't. If I manage to talk the detective into copying the files, then I should be home by tomorrow afternoon." There was some rustling on the other side, and then Will had to tell a student to go back to the group.

When Hannibal had his attention again, he asked, "If not?"

"If not, then I'll send the students home for the weekend and spend one more night here, get home Saturday," he said, exhausted already, as if he knew he would have to take that one night. "How's Rocko?"

"A little confused, but he's alright. We've been keeping each other company."

"That's good. Shit, I've gotta go. Our time inspecting the body is almost up and we didn't get permission to take photos." The apology and regret was clear in his tone, even if he didn't

voice it.

Hannibal hummed. "Do not work yourself too hard."

"Wouldn't want to reactivate my encephalitis."

"Certainly not. Oh, and Will?" A hum. "I miss you. Good luck for the rest of your trip." Hannibal hung up the phone.

Stuffing the device back in his pocket, he ignored it for the rest of the day. Thinking about Will would only worsen his misery. And Will was right - it would be impossible for them to spend the rest of their lives seeing each other everyday. Hannibal wished to take his students to London to see The Globe Theatre someday soon.

This mindset didn't make it any easier falling to sleep that night, or the night after when Will inevitably had to spend an extra night pestering the policemen for a copy case file. He wound up successful, though, to which he immediately called Hannibal, who congratulated him with matching excitement. Although, his excitement was misplaced.

He waited at the airport to pick Will up as the sun slugged down behind the horizon, his hands stuffed deep in his jacket. Hannibal watched his breath form in front of him then disappear, then did the same until he saw Will approaching. Smiling, he took in every shiver and puff of frost. Hannibal held out his hand, offering to help carry one of his bags, but Will just fell against his chest and dropped the bags in favour of clutching Hannibal’s jacket.

“I missed you too, Hannibal.” His voice was muffled against his throat, but Hannibal heard him loud and clear.

Nobody knew how long they stood there, holding each other. One would think that they had been separated for months and not days. Most of it was exhaustion - Hannibal had slept a total of seven hours the last three nights, and he had no doubt Will fared the same, judging from the creases under his eyes. Hannibal started dozing standing up. Fortunately, Will pulled back just in time.

“Home?”

Hannibal brushed a stray hair behind his ear. “Yes, home.”

They held hands all the way home. The roads were icy, so Hannibal drove slow, catching Will dozing beside him. Rocko didn’t come out to meet them outside, because of the snow was Hannibal’s guess, but greeted them enthusiastically in the doorway.

“I’ll start on dinner, if you would be so kind as to stoke a fire,” Hannibal hummed. Will held a breath, still. “Not to worry. I’ll make something quick.”

“Good.” He ruffled Rocko’s ears. “I’m not so keen on being without you tonight.”

“Neither am I.”

Will had started a fire in five minutes and Hannibal plated dinner in ten - he had prepared most of it before the drive. They had to, unfortunately, use their hands for their cutlery. Under the table they rubbed ankles, clad in socks. With the use of the oven and the fire going, the house thawed lovingly.

“How was it?” Hannibal asked. “Empathising with a killer again?”

WIll’s smile was light and humouring. “It used to bother me. Doing it on an everyday basis has proved to me that it isn’t that bad.” He quirked a brow. “Though you’ll always be more interesting, dear husband.”

The ring on his finger glinted in the firelight.

Hannibal’s face softened. He didn’t say anything, for once. There was so much to say, to ask. They had time for all of that. For now, he would follow Will into the kitchen, wash their dishes shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip. He would lead him to his bedroom, that had really become their bedroom over the last month or so, where the electric blanket had toasted their sheets.

Will lay on his back in the centre. Something about the placement, the light and colour, was incredibly profound. Hannibal wanted to sketch it, immortalise it to remember it forever, not lose it in their vast palace. He didn’t, however, have the patience or willingness to wait a moment more. So he crawled under the blankets with him, ticking the lamp and blanket off on his way. He settled against him how he always did - half draped across Will, clutching at his opposite side, their ribs slotted together. Hannibal was almost an accessory, he mused, hanging off him like this.

Really, Hannibal would have loved to bask in the moment. Feel Will reduced to a puddle as he fell asleep, listening to his breathing, his heartbeat. The moment he was comfortable, Hannibal was asleep.

Hannibal dreamt of Cuba. He had visited once in his early thirties. It was hot, both in memory and in dream. Sand, water. A beach. There was laughter, but Hannibal was alone. Alone aside from Will, who sparked another laugh out of him. Hannibal couldn’t remember what he had said, but the joy he felt was a warmth on par with the searing sun. Will’s hands were buried in the sand as they lounged, but Hannibal could still make out the shine of his ring.

This time, Hannibal didn’t wake up alone. He woke up to a light tug to his hair, then another. A gentle kind of pull. Enough to rouse him to open his eyes.

And what a sight it was. Will, eyes half lidded and dreary, a tired pull of his lip. He had his hands in Hannibal’s hair still, his scalp jerking with every mild yank. Blinking the blurriness from his eyes, Hannibal moved to sit up, but Will just guided his cheek back down to his chest.

“Stay,” he whispered, and Hannibal would obey every word when he looked at him like that.

Hannibal closed his eyes. The beat of a heart thumped against his temple, a tender hand fiddling with his hair still. He wasn't falling back asleep. Hannibal was the kind of man that once he was awake, he was awake. He didn't mind so much. Once Will's hands dropped in favour of rubbing shapes on Hannibal's back, he brought a hand up to see what the slight tightness was.

His brows furrowed. "You put braids in my hair?"

Will made a small movement, akin to a shrug in his semi trapped position. "Just little ones. Your hair isn't long enough to braid the whole lot."

"That wasn't the question, Will," he sighed, "and you know it."

"I didn't want to get up." The honesty struck Hannibal like a bullet. "I wanted to be with you, as you woke. A moment I had denied myself earlier."

"Why did you feel the need to deny yourself this?" Hannibal had personally never been more at peace, more sated.

Will threaded a finger through one of the braids and it fell apart, the hair falling out of place. "I was scared of feeling like this." He shook his head thoughtfully. "I'm not scared anymore."

He moved to skim his hand through Hannibal's greying hair, all the braids untangling. There was a bump on his finger. Not a callus or a knuckle. Jewellery. Will hadn't taken it off since the masquerade.

"Will." He got a hum in response, and a soft scratch to his scalp. "Tell me; why do you wear the ring?"

"Why do you?"

"A question in response to a question is considered rude," Hannibal claimed.

Will exhaled and some hair on Hannibal's forehead flittered. "You are a mirror, Hannibal. You live your life reflecting people, situations. People see you, but they don't really see you. I'm just like you - a mirror. Face two mirrors in front of each other and they'll reflect themselves."

With his sleep-addled brain, Hannibal connected the dots. "I infer you mean that whatever my reasoning for wearing the ring is the same as your own?"

"The very same."

Hannibal's heat didn't stutter, his breath didn't catch. He was rather calm and composed, even if the confession had warmed him all over.

"I have a very important question to ask you, Will."

Like a flower blooming, Will's small smile spread and widened. "Yes, Hannibal. Yes you can kiss me."

He did. Soft yet sure, first. Hannibal loved the scratch of his beard, the harder tugs at his hair. He loved the taste of the sigh that Will let out. Then, it seemed everything dawned on Hannibal. He pressed against Will harder with a groan, kissing him in a way that showed just how much he had craved it, ached and longed for it.

Will smiled into it, and it was awkward, and it was lovely, and it made Hannibal smile too. So wide that they couldn't kiss anymore, just nudge their noses together. It was like breaking for air in the Atlantic all over again, seeing Will after three years of his absence. Hannibal was satisfied, sated, and so in love with Will Graham, and the relief of knowing that Will was his to stake claim brought a hurricane of relief.

They spent the morning in bed, kissing. Up until nature called, and then Hannibal whisked them up some breakfast with Will at his back, arms tight around his waist. Afterwards, they watched Rocko jump through the snow with hot mugs in their hands. Not a moment went by in the day when they weren't touching or kissing, where Will wasn't lounging against Hannibal's side and Hannibal wasn't playing with Will's fingers.

For once, Hannibal fell asleep first. The familiar feel of miniature braids pulling at his scalp, matched with Will's breathing, coaxed him into it.

Will was there, the next morning. Asleep and perfect and still. His arms trapped Hannibal flat on top of him, a warning that he better not dare try and move. With his head to the side, he checked the time. The clock read 06:27. Minutes before Hannibal usually woke, and yet he couldn't find motivation to move an inch.

He did move, just enough to look at his phone screen. Hannibal squinted at the light and only just made out all the notifications. One was a weather alert of an oncoming snow storm, another a warning of icy roads. The next was from Mr. Verry.

Verry: Hello Arthur! It read. I am aware that both you and your husband live quite the ways out from Edinburgh. Given the recent weather events, the school committee has agreed that it would be safer if the both of you stayed home for the rest of the week. Don’t worry, you both will still be paid, so long as you tend to your students online. Stay warm Arthur!

Hannibal thanked whatever Gods were looking down on him. He set the phone down, careful not to jostle Will. Leaning up he kissed along Will’s neck. His pulse thrummed against his lips. Hannibal continued to his jaw and he kissed along the bone, up to the scar along his cheek. Then, to the one splitting his forehead. Will started to stir, but it didn’t deter Hannibal. He pecked down the bridge of his nose and followed it to his lips. Will inhaled endlessly and pressed into him, palms spread across Hannibal’s back, one over the Verger brand, possessively.

Pulling away with a hum, Will beamed at him. “Morning.”

“Good morning, darling.” Hannibal kissed him again. “A snowstorm is on its way. As such, we have been informed that we are not obligated to make our way to work.”

“So what you’re saying,” Will said, slow and teasing, and he licked over his canine and it made Hannibal shiver, “that I get you all to myself for a week?”

“We’ll be snowed in.” A smirk pulled at his lips, equally as teasing. “However will we keep warm?”

Will's burst of laughter could probably sustain Hannibal for the time being, but Will rolling him onto his back to kiss him senseless was even better.

Regrettably, they did emerge from bed to quickly head into town for essentials. The worst of the weather was meant to hit them in the morning tomorrow, so they bought groceries, things for Rocko’s food including a new toy for him (“Hannibal, he doesn’t need it,” Will had insisted. “I know he doesn’t need it, but Rocko is a good boy and he deserves it,” Hannibal countered). They had some firewood left at home but not enough. Will outright stopped Hannibal from buying any, firmly telling him he would cut some from their property and by the time they had used up their supply, the new batch would be dry enough.

By the time they got back home, it felt as if they were wet to the bone. Noses and fingertips red, Will started a fire while Hannibal whipped up some traditional ramen. Will’s distaste for soups would make the meal options slightly limited, but Hannibal was always adaptable. They didn’t even look at the table, sitting on the rug on the floor in front of the fire to eat.

Will chuckled, the noise drawing Hannibal’s attention from the lick of flames. “I used to eat ramen in college. I haven’t had it since.”

Hannibal nodded contemplatively. “I do hope that my cooking excels the quality of packet ramen.”

“Only just.”

They adorned themselves with hats and gloves and thick jackets once they finished lunch. Will brandished an axe. It hung loosely from his fingers, drawing a line across the top of the snow. Hannibal couldn’t take his eyes off it. When they found a half dead oak tree, Hannibal stood to the side while Will cut it down. He was grateful for another tree to lean on out of fear his knees would buckle.

Will swung at the tree. He hit the tree, but Hannibal saw the politician- one of the seven they had killed before leaving America. They intercepted him at his home and Hannibal hadn’t been able to lift so much as a finger before Will had killed him. He had a gun, but had dropped it in favour of taking the man’s own bread knife and butchering his face. He had died slowly, and painfully. Will made sure of that.

The tree creaked the more Will whacked it.

It was a fitting death, in Hannibal’s opinion. On their way to Scotland Will had pointed out their seven favours all fit the seven cardinal sins, the politician fitting pride. Proud he was, in his work and in his appearance. It was just a shame that he had vile ideals and manipulative tendencies. Hannibal stayed away from politics mostly, but apparently Will knew of him, and hated him with a passion.

Will started to sweat and pant, and Hannibal was fixated on him, on the flex of his arms and shoulders.

Twenty three mutilations all over the politician's body and then Hannibal caught his wrist. They slumped the man against his marble counter, the same way Julius Caesar was slumped against the marble monument in the painting by William Holmes Sullivan. If they had more supplies, Hannibal would have loved to string up the man to position him perfectly. Out of luck, it seemed, although the man was almost beyond recognition anyway, so it didn't really matter. Their client happily gifted them false passports.

"Are you going to help me, or are you just going to sit pretty?" Will puffed.

Back in the moment, Hannibal gave him a once over. "I believe you are the pretty one in this moment, Will."

He just scoffed and rolled his eyes.

Despite the wind picking up, they spent most of the afternoon outside chopping firewood. Hannibal would rush inside, fuel their fire, and bring Will a hot mug of coffee, then cocoa, then tea to keep him warm. All the while Rocko leapt through the snow, shivering but happy.

When they returned inside, the sky a dusty blue with the sun absent from behind the clouds, the fire had heated the house up enough to melt through their skin and warm them instantly. Will temporarily disappeared into his bedroom - or, rather, the spare bedroom, since Will had moved the majority of his clothing into Hannibal's room after they began sharing the space. Hannibal grabbed his laptop and sat in the living room, Rocko across his feet while he caught up with his days worth of work.

Will had the same idea and sat next to him to do the same. Hannibal watched him from the corner of his eye, noticed every time he would switch from working on his laptop to tapping on his phone. Without the luxury of free hands, they compromised and sat with their sides pressed impossibly close and Hannibal's head on Will's shoulder.

When Will's phone rang, he let out a loud and lengthy groan before picking up. Hannibal guessed and confirmed rather quickly it was the Irish police. He was only half paying attention to the phone call, though guessed from Will's impatience that they were struggling to solve the case. Of course, Will had already figured it out and narrowed it down to two of the dozen or so suspects.

Hannibal made a miffed huff when Will stood to pace the living area. He paid him no mind and waved him off when Hannibal silently reminded him not to help them in any way - it was not his job anymore, and the last thing either of them wanted was to get police officers curious about them. Although, by the sounds of it, they could reveal their true identities and the police over there would take several weeks to work out they were serial killers.

Rocko grew tired of Will's pacing and sat on the rug by the fire instead, his brown fur rusting by the light. Hannibal had half a mind to join him. Instead, he responded to one of his students' emails, explaining to her that she was allowed to do her papers on poetry instead of a novel, so long as the work lived up to the same standard.

A phone flew at the sofa, Will's phone. Hannibal just managed a look at him before he crawled into his lap. He crashed their lips together and sighed against Hannibal. Eager to get

his hands on him, Hannibal dropped his laptop on the sofa beside him. He touched along Will's waist, down the curve there, not like a woman's but noticeable still. He followed along to Will's thighs, wide and firm, surrounding.

Will had his own hands either side of Hannibal's face. With a firm press from the heels of his palms, and a harder press of his mouth, he managed to force Hannibal's open to slip his tongue between his lips. Hannibal moaned around him, immediately wrapping his own tongue around his. He sucked and licked into Will's mouth, shuddering at finally being able to taste him. Will, however, seemed determined for control and would not relent until Hannibal caved and gave in to his passion, flowing with it.

He was so busy paying attention to Will's mouth that he had lost track of his hands. That was true right up until warm fingers slipped under his shirt and glided up his stomach. Hannibal gasped, forcing the kiss to a halt. Will watched him, eyes searching and taking in everything. His fingers ventured across his sides, eliciting a tremble from Hannibal, and his hands flexed on Will's thighs, pulling him closer until their stomachs pressed against his each other enough to strain their already ragged breathing.

Hannibal had grown aroused, and was unsurprised when he felt Will in the same boat. They rocked together and a rhythm formed, metranomed by heavy sighs and grunts, muffled by each other's mouths. Will explored under his shirt and he touched everything he could reach, whereas Hannibal was not brave enough to do anything aside rub his palms either of Will's thighs.

He eventually gained the courage to sweep them over Will's ass, and got a groan as encouragement. So Hannibal groped, hard, dragging Will down his thighs to bring their erection together. Will moaned loud enough to resonate through the room, mouth open and tongue still half inside of Hannibal. Hannibal opened his eyes to watch.

Just as quickly as it had happened, Will was off him. He straightened himself on his knees and the warmth of his hands left cold spots all over Hannibal when they disappeared, favouring Hannibal's shoulders to further distance them. Immediately, Hannibal moved his hands from Will's backside to his back, trying and failing to coax him closer.

They ended up staring at each other. It would have been silent, had it not been for their rough pants and the crackle of the fire, the piercing scream of the wind and the abuse it inflicted on the leaves of the trees.

Only when Hannibal made the mistake of saying his name did Will leap off him. He collected his work things and was gone, the resounding slam of a door echoing around the house.

Hannibal didn't see him again until dinner. Keeping with the Japanese cuisine, he served teriyaki chicken on sticky rice, with beans, capsicum, carrot and ginger. Will showed no signs of discomfort over their meal, even chatted about the case in Ireland and how well some of his students had assessed the scene and body. Hannibal answered carefully each time he was obligated to.

Will took their plates to the kitchen as he always did, and Hannibal followed. He took a deep breath. "Will, I am unsure if this will come across as immature or inappropriate, but if I owe

you an apology for-"

The plate in his hand slipped into the sink with a loud crash. It hadn't broken, thankfully, but Will's neutral expression did. He seemed distant and cold - not the comfortable, laughing, warm face Hannibal had grown accustomed to these past few months. He used to admire the beauty of this certain expression, when Will would give in to his uncaring nature right before committing a physical or verbal act of beauty. Now, Hannibal grew uncomfortable under it.

Will said nothing when he walked around Hannibal and back into the corridor. With a sigh, he began to fill the sink with hot water.

It was minutes before midnight when Hannibal found it appropriate to retire to what was unofficially their room. He did this in hopes that Will would be asleep to avoid as much awkwardness as possible. Only, when he entered their room, it looked more like his own room. The first thing he noticed was that the weighted electric blanket was gone and the bed was neat. He checked and, yes, even Will's clothing had all been returned to his room.

The bed was cold, in spite of the fire that had been going all day. The duvet was soft and so was the mattress, too soft to be ribs and muscle, too still to be alive. Hannibal stayed awake wondering what went wrong.

He wondered the same thing for the next five nights.

The blizzard bordered on terrifying. It was dangerous going so much as out to their driveway, and even Rocko wasn't too keen on going outside to pee. Snow built up around their property, but the fire crackled every day throughout the day. Work went by in a blur, much easier on them both since it was all online.

Will engaged in conversation, although any semblance of routine was disrupted. They rarely ate meals together and Will would do his work in his room. They wouldn't kiss, wouldn't sleep in the same bed, and he wouldn't lounge against Hannibal on the sofa. There were no passing touches in the kitchen or nudges of ankles under the dining table.

Hannibal may as well have been sleeping in the snow, with how cold he had been. He wasn't sure how much of it was physical and how much was psychological. The distant face was only given to him when Will caught him staring for too long, in which Hannibal would look away. Partly in shame, partly in decency.

On the Sunday, the sun had miraculously emerged, ready to melt the ice on the road for them to travel on to Edinburgh the next day. Hannibal found Will in the living area sitting on the floor by the fireplace, files in one hand, Rocko's head in the other. Hannibal sat on the couch and crossed a leg over the other, the same way he used to sit in Baltimore.

"Will?" Will tilted his head, though didn't look up from the files. "Tell me about your father."

That grabbed his attention. "I told you about him before. Did you forget?"

It was an insult. As if Hannibal would ever forget anything Will told him. "You spared me the details. I do not wish to be spared, now."

"I spared you the details because they were boring details." Will set the files next to him and shrugged. "He was a single dad raising a messed up kid. But he did a good job. I should have learnt from him."

"Did he ever yell at you?" Hannibal decided to ignore all the missiles Will sent his way.

He shrugged again, indifferent. "Not really. He wasn't much of an angry man. What sparked this sudden curiosity?"

There was no point in lying to him. "Most survivors of verbal and emotional abuse will purposefully disrupt their peaceful lives in favour of conflict. This is because conflict is what they are used to, comfort is unnatural and strange to them."

"Ah." Will's eyebrows raised in understanding. "This is what this is about. My intentional rupture of peace."

"Yes," Hannibal said plainly. "I have thought about our last intimate moments over and over. You are reasonable, and if I had been too forward with you, you would have said as such. To severe the beginnings of a relationship is either self sabotage or a direct infliction of harm on myself."

Will glared at him. It was strange. Even with Will on the floor, practically at Hannibal's feet, in a large sweater and sweatpants, and bright yellow socks, he still fought for the upper hand.

"Do you remember when I called you calculating before you were impulsive, Hannibal?"

"Of course." The conversation seemed so distant now. "You said you didn't trust me, because you were waiting for my calculative behaviour to turn impulsive."

Will nodded. "A starving man will only grow hungrier if given a morsel of food."

"You gave me a taste of yourself only to draw away, trying to get me to act on my impulsiveness," Hannibal concluded. "You never trusted me."

"I trust you, Hannibal. But I trust your nature more. Eventually, figured that you'd give up on trying to seduce me because I wasn't what you wanted, or I wasn't enough, too frustrating."

Hannibal's expression grew tight. "All your experiment brought me was misery and loneliness, Will."

There was the realisation and guilt, flashing across Will's face in various stages.

"I apologise," Hannibal continued, "for letting you assume that I would ever give up on you. My feelings for you burn so hot that it will stretch across multiple lifetimes. I would write you songs and poems, if you wouldn't find them so tacky and embarrassing."

The comforting sound of Will's soft chuckle flared familiar in Hannibal's chest. Otherwise, Will remained silent.

With a sigh, Hannibal slipped down to the floor. He didn't close the distance between them, even if he wanted to, even if the space that couldn't be more than a metre felt like acres, kilometres. "Everything we have gone through, these past few months… the companionship, the lingering touches, the kisses. Were they fake, for you, Will?"

Will pressed his lips in a line and shook his head. "No, Hannibal. I just needed confirmation that there would absolutely be no turnover." He rubbed his belly, no doubt where the scar curved there. "History doesn't need to repeat itself."

"You said that last time," Hannibal accused.

"Hannibal," sighed Will, impatiently, "I would not be living with you in a cottage in Scotland if I did not love you endlessly. If I couldn't live without you. I just needed to make sure I wouldn't get my heart broken."

"So in doing so, you needed to break mine?" He tried to say so evenly, but it came out more of broken whisper.

Unexpectedly, Will smiled. A little shy, a little reminiscent. "Can I ask you a very important question, Hannibal?"

Hannibal recognised the repeated words immediately and nodded. Will walked on his knees over to him and there was no hesitation before kissing him. Soft and reverent, slow and endlessly loving. It was as if Will was attempting to pour all of his love via his mouth, and by God Hannibal would consume it, take it all, even if it grew overwhelming and too much. He would love Will just as Will would love him.

Will was clever with his tongue, just less oppressive and desperate as the last time. Their torsos were flat against each other and that's what Hannibal missed the most. The touch of his breastbone, the curve of his waist and the jut of his ribs. Still, Hannibal did nothing with his hands but fist his sweater at his waist, all while Will thoroughly messed up Hannibal's hair.

He parted and breathed against his lips. "I'm not running away," he promised, "but you have to give me a minute."

Hannibal just nodded dumbly, and Will flicked his gaze between his eyes a few times to make sure he understood. Will separated himself from him and helped Rocko stand by a slight pull of his collar. He guided the dog into his bedroom and came out a moment later.

Beckoning Hannibal to the soft rug, Will set something aside on the brick fireplace by his knees. A boiling heat flooded Hannibal's gut when realised that something was lubricant. Will kissed him with purpose and pushed him on his back, their sleeping position reversed. He pressed a thigh between Hannibal's thighs and against the growing bulge in his pants. Hannibal didn't bother stopping the rock of his hips, pleased to meet a matching hardness.

Will whispered against Hannibal's lips. "I want to sit on your cock and ride you like a fucking racehorse."

Hannibal would have laughed at the vulgarity if he hadn't moaned, so turned on he was burning up. "Yes, Will."

The next handful of moments were a blur of hands and clothes. The fire next to them was hot enough to singe their bare skin pink and make Will's dark hair hot as the flames itself. Both of them reached for the lube at the same time.

"I want to," rasped Hannibal. He wanted to make Will writhe and squirm on his fingers, to beg to sit on him.

"Would you rather assist the show or be a part of the audience?"

While Hannibal considered, because both options were as appetising as the other, Will took advantage of his hesitancy and lubed his fingers up. Before Hannibal had even caught up with what was happening Will reached behind himself and stuck his finger inside himself. All Hannibal was able to see was the flex of his wrist and the slight pinch of his face. Somehow, that was more arousing than if he had been given a full view.

When Will started to moan at the second finger, Hannibal kissed him. There was plenty of time to hear him soon. For now, he wanted to swallow every noise, feel it vibrate in Will's chest and across his own. And now that he wasn't frightened of Will running off again, Hannibal touched him everywhere he could reach. His long hair, down his nape and across his back. He nudged Will's thighs higher and tighter around him, in kind resulting in a twitch of Will's cock against his stomach.

Continuing his venture to Will ass, he counted three fingers stuffed into his rim, wet and tight. Hannibal followed his crack to feel the quake that shook Will, enough for him to lose concentration on his mouth, favouring panting into Hannibal's throat. All he did was circle around his fingers and Will retracted them for him to replace with his own. He did, and matched Will's sigh with his own. He was hot, hotter than his skin and hair, as hot as the flame.

Hannibal found his prostate in seconds. He was a practised doctor, of course, and an even more practised lover. But Will pushed his wrist even as he whined and arched.

"I want your dick against those nerves, not your fingers, Doctor."

Never had a title aroused Hannibal more than it did in that moment. It was Will who rubbed lube against Hannibal's cock, and he was the one who guided it to his hole. Hannibal rubbed from his hips down to his thighs, and up again. It clearly relaxed him enough to lower himself down, inch by inch, his bottom lip drawn between his teeth and his eyes unfocused with concentration.

He almost sat completely but Hannibal couldn't stop his hips from grinding up the rest of the way. Will's gasp was harsh and after a beat, he dropped all the way down. Hannibal soothed him with his hands, expecting him to take a second to adjust. As always, Will proved his expectations wrong and lifted his hips, panting at the drag, then dropped his weight again.

Hannibal arched off the rug. With every drop of Will's hips, he snapped his own to meet him. Will's hands were planted just below his chest and he used Hannibal's body as leverage, the skin bruising around his finger tips.

"Fuck, fuck." Will threw his head back. His Adams apple rose and fell and his throat was so alluring it took all of Hannibal's self control not to lean up and cover him in love bites. "I knew you'd feel good."

Hannibal moaned as Will grinded down harder. "Imagined it often, did you?"

Will's laugh was breathy and tailed by a grunt. "These past few nights? Oh yeah."

His self control slipping, Hannibal sat up and circled his arms around him. With every forceful drop of Will's body, Hannibal matched it by tugging him down harder, pushing his cock as far as it could physically go.

"Tell me," he panted, "of every detail you pictured."

Will moaned uncontrollably. It took slowing their rhythm down for him to gain the ability to speak again.

"I thought of riding you on the sofa that day, mostly. I wanted to - ah - so bad, feeling you under me. I wondered if you would control the rhythm or lay back and take it. I wasn't sure which made me more aroused."

Whining against the hollow of Will's throat, Hannibal licked there, a warning, before taking the skin in his mouth. Will jumped and stopped bouncing to sigh and press his twitching cock against the soft of Hannibal's stomach. Then, he started again with newfound fervour.

"There's more," Will murmured against his ear. His words were broken with sighs and whimpers and moans, but he wouldn't stop telling him, and Hannibal didn't want him to stop. "I had a dream you fucked me in your bed."

"Our bed," Hannibal amended, then moved across Will's throat to bloom another mark.

"Our bed. So hard that I couldn't stand." When he chuckled, Hannibal could feel it through his throat, and the jolts of his velvet walls.

Hannibal rolled the flesh of Will's hips in his hands, and shoved his thighs down strong enough to elicit a mewl. "Tell me more."

Will huffed. He grasped at Hannibal's shoulders, heaving and swallowed hard. "I thought about bending you over the kitchen counter, teasing you until you begged me to put my cock in you."

The haggard moan Hannibal made was followed by another.

"Fuck, you like that one, huh?" Will rolled his hips. "I felt you twitch."

After that, neither of them had the composure to say coherent sentences. Will chanted harder and faster among his guttural moans, whereas Hannibal only had the capacity to whisper Will's name like a prayer. Their lack of words was made up for in the slick sound of their bodies connecting, over and over again with obscene insistence.

Hannibal detached himself from Will's throat enough to admire him. His skin was bordering red from the fire, slick with sweat. The marks across his neck and collar were as deep as he had intended them to be, prominent and gorgeous. Muscles flexed with all of his movements, thighs and torso containing Hannibal, pinning him to the ground.

Will took his face in his hands and kissed him, much less brutal and demanding than expected. Closed mouth and sickly sweet. Will kissed him like they wouldn't see each other tomorrow. It was a statement that what they had, this right there was not mindless fucking, but love making. Hannibal clutched him tighter.

"Hannibal, do that thing again." He was about to ask exactly what he meant by the request when Will moved Hannibal's hands to his backside.

Immediately Hannibal groped and dragged him along his dick. Will trembled until he was limbless, fallen against him. He continued to tell Hannibal just how hard he wanted him until his chants dissolved until all he could do was pant and claw at his shoulders.

Will came with no warning. His thighs fluttered and his nails broke skin, a moan poured directly into Hannibal's shoulder. He rocked him through it as far as his own climax would stave off. Hannibal pulled out as he came all up Will's arched back.

They sat in the same position for so long, breathing each other in and clinging close, that Hannibal's legs were numb. Cum dripped down their bodies and onto the rug, and yet they still didn't move. Just kissed and caught their breath, then kissed some more.

Only when they heard Rocko start to paw at the door did they separate, a matching smile on either of their faces.

"Stay here," Hannibal whispered, helping Will slide down his thighs. When he stood his knees wobbled and Will laughed at him.

He returned with some paper towels and wiped them both clean, then promptly threw it in the fire. Slowly, and with many distracting kisses, they tugged their clothes back on. While Hannibal started to cook dinner, Will moved the blanket, as well as his clothes, back into their room. Not a word was spoken.

Once Will completed the move, he came behind Hannibal and thread his arms around his waist. His previous words wiggled their way to the forefront of Hannibal's brain and if he were a younger man, he would be hard again. Alas, he resumed making their meal, and every opportunity he had to lean into Will, he took it.

Will stretched under the blanket like a cat in nothing but his boxers late that night. Hannibal climbed in after him, naturally laying on top of him. The breath of air that escaped Will blew through his hair. Once again, Hannibal was out cold in minutes.

They woke up early to shovel the last of the snow from the driveway together. In the car to work, they held hands under no pretence of warmth. Hannibal kissed Will when they had to walk their separate ways and only when Will pawed at him, muttering something about decency and inappropriate for school, did Hannibal pull away. Then, Will pecked him once more and left.

Hannibal walked into his class at the end of the day. A few months ago, he would wait outside or by the car as their classes really couldn't be further apart. But, the pleasant surprise on Will's face made it worth the wait.

"Hello, Arthur. Couldn't wait to see me?"

"Every moment without your presence is a lonely moment." Hannibal would have leaned in for another kiss had it not been for a loud cough by the door.

"Oh, don't let me interrupt you love birds." It was Lilian, the woman in the peacock mask from the masquerade. Without the accessory, Hannibal could see the orange freckles stained on her face from many years in the sunlight. "Actually, I am interrupting you, because we're gonna be using blacklight flashlights later in the week and the last thing the students want to see is their middle aged teacher's semen."

"Pleasant as always, Lilian," sighed Will, just as he finished packing his laptop away.

She stepped up to the desk in front of them and crossed her arms. She was a small woman, although that did not take away from her intimidating demeanour. "Yes, while I'm glad the two of you have found a way to be even more affectionate with each other, make sure, Arthur, you try to chew your husbands skin off somewhere easy to cover up with clothing."

Lilian pointed at her own neck. Hannibal's eyes darted to Will's and, he hadn't even noticed this morning, but there were bite marks and hickeys all around his throat. He cringed slightly and rubbed his brow in hopes it would hide some of the redness.

"Yes, my apologies."

"I'll keep better control of him next time," Will laughed, tugging Hannibal by the hand. Lilian made an amused, but rather disgusted sound.

One of Will's hands stayed on the steering wheel, the other blindly traced the lines on Hannibal's palm. He was smiling, although neither had said much since leaving Edinburgh. Will struggled to key open the door with Hannibal behind him, kissing up his neck wherever he hadn't managed to reach yesterday.

"You're insatiable, Hannibal," Will snorted as he finally managed to get the front door open, Rocko sniffing at their boots.

"I thought you promised to control me?"

"Oh I should have known that would get you going." Hannibal pushed him against the wall not as gently as he had intended. All the air in Will's body escaped him in a hurry, and

Hannibal was on the brink of apologising when he was pulled into a bruising kiss.

He slid his hands down Will's thighs and hoisted him up, wrapping those solid thighs around his waist. Hannibal swallowed Will's gasp.

"You seem surprised, Will." His voice was just as shaky as Will's breathing. "You are certainly not the heaviest body I have lifted."

As if proving it, he hiked Will up higher. His inner thigh rested against the bullet's exit wound, a mark that he often forgot about now, and Will's calf tightened over the brand on Hannibal's back. Moving through the house, Hannibal kicked the door closed to their bedroom. He dumped Will on their bed. The devouring look he gave Hannibal was enough to force him to shiver.

Will laughed when Hannibal struggled on the zip of his jeans, and then laughed at himself when his fingers slipped on Hannibal's buttons. It was silly - he was basically laughing at nothing, but Hannibal found himself joining in. He had never laughed much during sex, and yet he couldn't think of any other way to do it. Soon enough, their laughter dissolved into breathless moans, strained grunts, and whispers of each other's names that sounded dangerously close to prayers of worship.

Later, months later, when the weather had started to warm and flowers and lambs sprung around them, and their bellies were full from their Italian meal, they lay in the same position they had the night before, and the night before that, the very same that they would lay for the foreseeable future. Will braided small pieces of Hannibal's hair absently, lost in thought.

"Hannibal?" The vibrations of the words travelled through Will's chest and Hannibal felt it across his cheek. He hummed in response. "What is it that you're scared of?"

Hannibal propped his chin on Will's sternum. It was a funny angle, one he had grown to love and appreciate as all the others. "Messing this up."

"Messing us up?"

"Yes," he confirmed. "Despite my age, I have very little experience in relationships. Even then, I have never loved anyone, anyone at all, besides you and Mischa."

Will untangled one of the braids and started to redo it. "Tell me about your relationships."

He said it not in a possessive, consuming way. Which Hannibal would have preferred, because Will's genuinity was just as painful as his cruelty; a different pain, more an ache of a cold blade than the piercing of the blade itself, but a pain in itself. What he did appreciate was the focus on Hannibal's relationships rather than his sister. Hannibal would tell him one day, when he was ready. Of snow and blood, of fear and crying until it hurt, of the taste of his sweet Mischa, who never deserved it. At the moment, with soft spring rain pitter pattering their rooftop, Hannibal was happy to talk of lighter subjects.

"I had a girlfriend at seventeen. Her name was Anika. We were a part of a study group and I knew she had a crush on me. I dated her because of that, as well as the curiosity for sex. The

next girlfriend I had was in my mid twenties and I asked her out because she was incredibly intelligent, and because her apartment in Paris was close to where I was studying."

Will chuckled, but stayed otherwise silent. He began to pull the hairs at Hannibal's nape into a braid and Hannibal had to snap himself out of the sensation.

"The next partner I had was a man. He was a wonderful musician, absolutely magnificent. That, and my curiosity of intercourse with the same sex were my motivations for asking him to dinner. My next boyfriend was because I wanted to kill him, but he had a large family and an even larger number of friends. It was the easiest way to get to him, without getting caught. The next was Alana, and I am quite sure you are aware of the reasoning for bedding her without my having to say. All of my relationships I ended myself, one way or another."

"You're forgetting someone," Will said smugly, drawing Hannibal into a kiss.

Hannibal planted his elbows either side of his head, but otherwise backed up. He needed to make sure he knew. "Will. What we have is not convenience nor curiosity. When I tell you I love you, I need you to know that you are the only living person who I can say that to honestly. We have a complicated history, so-"

"I know, Hannibal." Will had his hand over Hannibal's mouth. "I know you love me, and I know you mean it."

When he pulled his hand away, Hannibal asked him, "You do?"

"Something that has drawn us to each other is our minds. We are the same, up here." Will tapped his forehead, and then Hannibal's. "We share that space. But we also spend too much time up there. So much so, that we have only just begun to realise that we share this space, as well." He touched his chest, just over his heart, and then Hannibal's. "I can feel how much you love me, is what I'm trying to say."

"Well, Will Graham," Hannibal said, a smirk in his voice as the weight of their conversation lifted. "I didn't pick you as a romantic."

Will groaned and tightened his arms around his lower back. "I'm not, don't get your hopes up."

With a laugh, something Hannibal has been doing a lot these past few months, he settled into the crook of Will's neck. He was ready to sleep, a weight off his chest and braids in his hair. Will's heavy sigh told him that would not come just yet.

"I wish we could get married." His voice was hardly over a whisper, but Hannibal heard him. He almost corrected him - the rings on their fingers, same last names, and laminated piece of paper proved that they were married. But then it clicked. Not Arthur and Eddie, these fabricated personas, but Hannibal and Will.

"Our marriage certificate states different names, although that is not to say the love that we share is fake," he said instead. "But I agree with you. It is most unfortunate."

It would be too difficult to marry Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham together. Not to mention would compromise everything they had built in the past year and a half, not only exposing them to the people in their life around them, but also placing themselves on Jack Crawford's radar. Dangerous and immature, and yet Hannibal would attempt to find a way.

“What kind of wedding would you have liked?” He asked Will.

“A spring garden wedding. Could probably do it in our own yard.”

Hannibal imagined it. The vibrant grass and range of flowers, Rocko barking somewhere in the distance. White chairs with faceless, unimportant guests. He hummed. “I would hire a harpsichordist to play, damn the complications of getting the instrument outside.”

The room that used to be Will’s room was renovated to have shelves upon shelves of books along each wall, and a harpsichord in the middle. Whenever Hannibal played, Will would join him, sitting on the adjacent chair, reading or watching.

“I would want you to make the cake,” Will admitted. “All the other food doesn’t matter, but the cake. And we would hyphenate our names.”

“Hyphenating our names would be like a symbol of us finally joining.”

“Exactly.” Will held him a little tighter. “And, yes. We would dance. As much as I would embarrass myself, I know I wouldn’t be able to resist if you asked.”

They lost themselves in the exchange. It wasn’t a melancholy conversation - dreaming of what they could have had, but now it is too late, too far gone, until Hannibal would find a way. Instead, it was the earnest chatter of lovers’ as they constructed new rooms in their palace. They would return to this room, Hannibal resolved, as he drifted off to sleep to the sound of Will’s voice.

Shrike

Chapter Notes

thank you all for your patience !!

Will woke up when a thumb brushed over his eyebrow. He flinched and twitched and the hand dropped to his shoulder. The first thing he noticed when opening his eyes was the world was slanted - and it took a moment longer to realise it was because he was leaning on Hannibal's shoulder.

"We have arrived," he said, though didn't stand up until Will sat straight and thoroughly blinked the fuzziness from his eyes. Hannibal took his hand and didn't let go as they stepped off the train. Even as he addressed his class, he didn't let go, squeezing at intervals.

Will faded himself into the background whilst Hannibal discussed the importance of Shakespear's literature throughout history. He half listened, half turned his attention to the theatre itself - from the outside, it appeared to be just another old building. There were similar ones around Europe, although none as pristine. Once they stepped inside, he felt it. The history and the value of every wooden board and grain of dirt. Most of all, Will felt the excitement radiating off of Hannibal. To anyone else, he would have appeared to have been only mildly enjoying the visit. To Will, whose hand had started to go numb with how hard Hannibal held it, knew that his little smile was the equivalent of a toothy grin.

They took the back of the herd of students while they followed a tour guide, who seemed to only be able to speak when his hands were making large motions.

"I sincerely hope he doesn't wack one of your students," Will muttered. It took everything in his power not to kiss the bubbly laugh straight from Hannibal's lips.

Will zoned out again while they walked around, content to look around and listen in on Hannibal's odd anecdotes. Nearing the end of the day, Hannibal departed to further talk with his students. Will didn't really pay attention as he didn't need to.

Instead, he stood in front of the stage. Will wasn't as enthusiastic about literature and theatre as Hannibal, but he knew enough to appreciate his husband's view. He ran his finger across the top of the stage. No dust was left on his finger. Many of the conversations he and Hannibal shared over the years, the pretentious ones, with layers and ambiguous metaphors, often referenced plays and poems. The conversations that were battles of wit where both of them and neither of them emerged on top. Many of those plays were performed here, written nearby.

"If we lived in the sixteen hundreds, I would invite you to all of Shakespeare's plays."

The voice made Will turn. He almost didn't recognise the man, but his polite grin reminded him of their tour guide. Will hadn't bothered remembering his name.

Will told the tour guide exactly what he told Hannibal when he had said the same thing. "I wouldn't go. Life expectancy in those days wasn't nearly what they are today. But even given I was still alive at forty, I would be here on the ground, not in the seats, since I'm about as poor as dirt. Rather fitting analogy."

The man's smile just widened. "I would take you up to the seats, even if I had to sneak you."

"I wouldn't find it worth it, not now and not then."

"You know," he smirked, really not picking up on Will's apathetic feelings for the conversation, "you're smarter than you look. I just love your quick wit."

"That's not the compliment you think it is." Will flicked the hair tie off his wrist, making a show of his ring as a subtle indicator. He tied his hair up and made sure to reflect the sunlight off the jewellery, but the man's skull was so thick he could have thrown a brick at it.

"Why don't you come to lunch with me? I've still got about twenty minutes. Besides, there's this really nice cafe that just popped up nearby."

Will rolled his eyes. "Ahh yes, my husband wanted to take me there as well."

Finally he seemed to see the ring, just not take the hint. He looked for Hannibal, who was turned away to chat with one of his students. Although he appeared distracted, Will could tell he knew exactly what was happening.

"You're married to the literature professor?" The tour guide pointed, as if Will wasn't sure which man it was that he had been so entangled with these last few years. "Him?"

"You seem surprised." Will was toying with him now. The tour guide clearly thought that he was out of Hannibal's league, which was hilarious, and incredibly wrong as they were in their own separate league.

"I just…" He sucked through his teeth. "He looks a bit older than you are, and he's so serious."

"I've done nothing but deny your advances and insult you, and you think he's the serious one?"

The tour guide sighed, but he was still smiling. He really couldn't take no for an answer. "Just one lunch? He won't even have to find out."

"Oh he already knows," chuckled Will.

"What? What do you mean?"

Will could hardly stifle a sinister grin, and pretended to cough so he wouldn't come across as weird. "He's very attentive, especially to me. I apologise."

"Nahh, don't worry about it. I should probably stop going after married guys anyway," he laughed.

"No, I mean I apologise for what's to come."

Will left him by the stage before he had the chance to ask what he meant by that. As soon as he was close enough, Hannibal had his arm around his waist. He touched along the curve of Will's hips that he loved so much, not that he said anything about it.

"Are you alright?" Hannibal asked, only loud enough for Will to hear.

"Just fine. He was pushy, but he finally took no for no." He slid his own arm around Hannibal, a hand over the soft of his stomach. It was hotter, almost summer. So, Hannibal mostly went without his jacket and rolled his sleeves up. It was the closest thing Will got to eye candy from Hannibal without him actually being naked.

Hannibal hummed with a frown. "Incredibly rude, nonetheless."

Will didn't argue. Hannibal treated his students to lunch before they all made their way back to the train station. Only, Hannibal and Will were to spend a night in London. The fancy hotel room was about the size of their own cottage, and perfectly contrasted the motel rooms they frequented while on the run in America.

They went to dinner at a French restaurant in the middle of town, and sat at one of the outside tables. It was pleasantly warm, even though it was late. The city appeared to glow around them and Hannibal sketched some buildings as they waited for their food. He touched the toe of his shoe to Will's ankle under the table.

"Did you enjoy this visit? You told me you hadn't been to the Globe Theatre before," asked Will, watching his hands shift the sketchpad into his bag while their plates arrived.

"It was extraordinary. A dream of mine came true." Hannibal cut into his food. "Today has, as well, presented me with new opportunities."

Will smiled around his mouthful. He knew exactly what he was meaning, and it was not the type of conversation to have over dinner in a restaurant. Once the bill was settled, they walked back to their hotel. Hand in hand, Will watched their feet pass over stones while Hannibal stared at the cloud covered sky.

Hannibal rested against his chest in the bathtub. Their own wasn't large enough for Hannibal because of his preference for showers, let alone the both of them, so Will had filled it as hot as they could stand it to make it last. He kissed Hannibal's neck, tender and hot from the steam. With a pleased croon, he tilted his head to give Will access to do as he pleased.

Do as he pleased, he did. He pecked down Hannibal's neck to shoulder, spotted with freckles and hair. He wasn't the first male partner Will has ever had, much to Hannibal's surprise and disgruntlement, but he was special in all other ways. Namely, Will found it easy to initiate affection. So much so that he didn't even notice how much he really touched him.

"Will," Hannibal panted eventually, while Will slid his hand up his naked thigh under the thicket of soap suds.

It used to be scary, how easy it was with Hannibal, how he lost himself in his motions. Will didn't hesitate or flinch away this time. He pushed his hand higher, firmer, until he grasped Hannibal where he was most sensitive. When he twitched in his hand, Will twitched against Hannibal's back.

Hannibal turned to him and crushed their mouths together. He brought a hand behind Will's head to claw at his hair, shamelessly rolling his hips against his fist. Will played with him for a while. Held him tight, on the brink of pain, his pace slow to make Hannibal heave and twitch. Then, Will would loosen his grip to barely a touch and his hand moved so quick that the water got on the floor.

Writhing, Hannibal gasped and bucked against him. Just when he was about to finish, and Will had made him cum so many times that he knew the signs like he knew his own, he pulled away. Hannibal whined his pleasure but was silenced with a kiss.

"I want you on the bed, Hannibal," Will whispered. "Dry, and naked. I don't want you to touch yourself."

Hannibal turned fully to leave a trembling kiss to Will's lips. "Yes, Will."

He rushed out of the water and patted himself down with the towel. Hannibal closed the door on his way out. With a sated sigh, Will sank lower in the tub until his chin touched the water. Just thinking about Hannibal tempted him to push his hand back under the water again. He didn't touch himself for long, but enough to get his heart racing and his dick aching for him.

Will took his time getting dry. The hotel provided fluffy bathrobes which he pulled on, though he figured tying the silk drawstring was a waste of time, as it would only be slipped free a moment later. He was glad to see Hannibal had completely ignored the robe to lay naked on the bed as instructed. His hands were neatly on his thighs, not touching himself intimately, despite remaining hard.

Will took the empty space between his legs and kissed him before he could say another word. Instantaneously Hannibal was touching - one hand ran along his chest and disappeared under the robe, the other stuck in his hair while he dragged Will on top of him using his legs. He allowed Hannibal to take his fill for a moment longer than intended.

Reaching to the floor, his mouth never leaving Hannibal's skin, Will searched through his bag. When his fingers circled around a cold bottle, he nipped at Hannibal's ribs. Will sat up on his knees to admire the man under him. Hannibal, who was as beautiful as he was sophisticated, who had created as much pain as he had beauty, had his fists buried in the pillow behind his head and a sheen of sweat had started to form.

Hannibal's thighs would shake every time Will danced his hands up his skin. There were no walls that shielded his expression. He allowed Will to see his desperation for touch, and yet his satisfaction of being able to be awarded this much. Hannibal would never be so rude as to

voice any demands for Will, but that didn't mean Will didn't see his desires like his resolve was made of glass.

He leaned down and kissed Hannibal's inner thigh. "I'm going to take my time with you."

Hannibal's breath hitched in his throat. He eyed the bottle of lube Will held as he poured some on his fingers, and stayed silent while Will drew a wet line up from Hannibal's knee. Finally, he dipped his slick fingers across his taint and down to circle his hole. The sleeve of his robe no doubt tickled wherever it touched. Hannibal covered his mouth with the back of his hand to stifle a noise, which sparked an idea in Will.

"Don't make a noise, Hannibal," he whispered, sliding his index down to the hilt. Hannibal jerked and his legs widened, but he stayed quiet just as he was told. "We have neighbours on both sides."

With a nod, Hannibal angled his hips up while stuffing a pillow beneath him. Will was true to his word - he fingered him like he had all the time in the world. The languid press of his finger made Hannibal fidget, and at the second he would wriggle against the sheets, his own hands flexing. By the third he had that watery look in his eye. The one that pleaded Will when his fucked up morals wouldn't let him voice it. Will ignored him for a while, transfixed on the flutter around his fingers, the heat, the pressure.

Even Will grew impatient, so he withdrew his fingers. Hannibal gave a whine. Giving him a hard look while he ran lube down his dick, Will tutted.

"Quiet, Hannibal," he warned, "because if you're good, then I'll make you scream as loud as you can when we get back home."

He didn't reprimand Hannibal for the moan he let out then. Will did, however, position himself to slide inside of him after shucking off the robe. Arching off the mattress, Hannibal's face was contorted into a silent gasp. Thanks to his dutiful preparation, Will could push home with one smooth movement. He didn't bother to wait for Hannibal to adjust and started a relaxed rhythm.

Will tried to stay with the slow pace, to show Hannibal that he was his play with. Hannibal didn't make it easy, although for once, Will guessed it wasn't on purpose. His stomach rolled and flexed, hard muscle beneath the pale skin there - unmatched however, to the bulge of his bicep and the deep coloured veins running up his forearms. The incline of his lower back off the pillow whenever Will's hips would snap unexpectedly was the last straw.

Will withdrew to the head and thrusted in him hard enough to rock the bed. A strangled noise escaped Hannibal so Will did it again. His hand flew to his face and Hannibal bit the junction between his thumb and finger, silencing himself. The pace wasn't jackhammering, but Will fucked him with urgency, hard enough to leave both of them aching tomorrow.

There was a flutter of Hannibal's eyelashes, a certain expression dawned on him. Will snapped his hips again.

"Speak, Hannibal. I know there's something you want to say."

Releasing his hand, donned with deep bite marks, Hannibal sighed. "You enjoy this. Being on top. The first - ah- the first time we made love, you were on top."

Will let out a breathy laugh. His hands on Hannibal's thighs glided to his hips and his grip was taut. Will wanted to look him in the eye, but Hannibal had his head thrown back in ecstasy, so Will just leaned over him enough for a better view. The beginnings of sweat wet his forehead.

"The definition of empathy," Will huffed, "is the ability to understand or share the feelings with another. I don't have a preference who goes where, with us." He gave himself a moment to swallow and catch breath before he continued. "But you do. You love seeing me above you, taking control. I just love seeing you feel good. Does getting fucked by me make you feel good, Hannibal?"

If the frantic nodding wasn't enough to answer his, somewhat rhetorical, question, the sudden tightness around Will's cock definitely did. Will's sigh came out shaky, but he just rocked his hips harder.

They had never talked much during sex. Most of the time they laughed and made lots of noise, taking full advantage of their large countryside property. But never had they talked much aside from the odd obscenity. Once Will had the ball rolling, he couldn't stop it.

"Did that guy from today bother you?" He punctuated with a brutal grind of his hips.

Something passed over Hannibal's face. As if he'd rather be thinking about something else, but now that he was thinking about it, it was consuming him, chewing him up and digesting him in the most agonising way possible.

"Yes." Hannibal's voice came out gravelly and angry. "I wanted to kill him where he stood."

Will rammed into him with a fierce vigor he didn't know he was still young enough to achieve. Hannibal keened his pleasure, biting into his hand again. It was useless. The rhythmic creaking of the bed held no illusion for their neighbours as to what exactly they were up to.

"You have no reason to be jealous. Nobody can take me away if there's nothing to take - I am yours completely."

Blood now dripped down his wrist from the force of his bite. Every exhale of Hannibal's was tailed by a soft noise that, despite his best efforts, increased in volume.

It took precisely four strokes of his cock to make Hannibal cum. His thighs clamped around Will's hips and his teeth aggravated the cut more in his attempt at silence. He clenched around Will like a vice, drawing out his own orgasm with a low groan.

Panting, sweating, and grinning, Will kissed Hannibal tenaciously. When his mind returned to him, Hannibal buried his fingers in Will's knotted hair, curled from the sweat. He made to move but Will placed a hand on his chest, slipping from the bed instead. Already he noticed an ache in his hips and thighs, and it caused him to smile a little more.

Will wiped both himself and Hannibal, and what got on the bedding, with a damp flannel. Whilst cleaning out his husband, Will committed the sight of his spend inside him to memory. A thought of Hannibal sitting on his face while he ate him out flashed across his brain, and while the idea made him dizzy and his gut twist, they were both far too old and bodies far too jaded to even consider it. Instead, he lay in the centre of their massive bed and Hannibal immediately climbed over him.

Their breathing synced, their heartbeats. Will drifted off caressing the indent on Hannibal's back where his spine was.

He woke, not two hours later, to Hannibal crawling off of him. Will snatched his wrist before he could stand.

In the moonlight that shone through the thin curtains, he could see Hannibal smile. "I didn't mean to wake you, darling."

"Where are you going?"

"Nowhere important." He leaned down and brushed hair from Will's brow before kissing him. It was kind and loving, and Will let go of his wrist to cup his face. Hannibal took that moment to pull away quicker than he could grab him, and started to dress.

"If it's nowhere important, then can I come?" Challenged Will, propping himself on his elbow.

Hannibal paused. "I love you, very dearly Will. Even the side of you that decides to be unnecessarily difficult."

"That's not an answer."

"The answer is no." He had dressed in yesterday's clothes, which struck Will. Hannibal was too clean and fussy to do that, normally.

"Why not?"

Hannibal crossed the room and kissed Will again. He didn't resist, too addicted to the taste of him to deny him, even whilst arguing.

He sighed against Will's lips. "I am going to get you a gift. Something I can only get here in London."

Will pulled him in again. The kiss was lazy, the etches of sleep blurring the edges of his mind. He clawed at Hannibal's jaw until he leaned over him, hands pushed into the mattress.

When he pulled back, Will was smiling. "Alright. Even though I told you that the tour guide isn't worth the time."

Hannibal frowned. "Must you always ruin your own surprises?"

"Must you always make them so obvious?"

"I try my best to avoid it."

With a chuckle, Will smooched him again before falling back into the pillows. "Alright. Stay safe. If you aren't home in an hour, I'll come looking for you."

"Two hours."

"An hour and a half. Have fun, babe," Will hummed with a wink.

In the dim light, he saw Hannibal flare red. It was sweet - an adjective he never thought he would use to describe him. Hannibal called him a volume of names. Dear, darling, sweetheart, mylimasis. But whenever Will called him one back, babe, baby, or darling, though his southern drawl came out more on the latter, Hannibal grew shy.

"I will, dearest. Go back to sleep."

Will watched him until the door clicked closed. He set a timer on his phone for an hour and snatched a spare pillow to hold against his chest.

It turned out to be Hannibal to wake him, not the alarm, though as soon as the shower was turned on his phone started to vibrate. Will pressed it off and tried to stay awake for Hannibal, but the next thing he knew his second alarm was going off and the man on top of him was swiping it away.

They stayed in bed until twenty minutes before they were made to leave their room. Hannibal slept on the train, his hand in Will's while he watched through the window.

Unsurprisingly, there was a police checkpoint at Edinburgh Waverley Station. Will only got impatient when they had to wait half an hour to get interviewed. Will was taken in first.

"You were in London, the night of the murder of Tommy Aranea?" The detective asked, after the routine questions of name and occupation and such.

"I was. I was booked into a hotel and stayed there just for a night." Will had no problem controlling his face to perfect neutrality.

"Purpose of visit?"

"My husband took his students to see The Globe Theatre. I wanted to join him."

The cop bristled at the word 'husband'. "And were you with your husband all night?"

"Oh yes."

"When he comes in, will he confirm this?"

"No doubt about it. We hardly had time to sleep, if you catch my drift. If you don't believe me, the limp he has will confirm our alibi, won't it?"

The detective made a disgusted face and motioned for him to leave. When he sat down, Hannibal stood for his own interview. Will had noticed his slight limp this morning, and now the detective noticed it too, with a roll of his eyes.

They were driving home in less than ten minutes. Will didn't ask Hannibal if he was careful - if the police were conducting interviews like this one, it was evidence enough that they had no idea what had hit them.

"It's a shame," sighed Will, "that I never got to see my present."

Hannibal checked the time on the stereo as he drove. "Do you know of the shrike bird, Will?"

"Otherwise known as the 'butcher bird'. A songbird, yet a carnivorous one. Likened to Vlad the Impaler for its method of impaling its prey."

Hannibal hummed. "Very good. Do you know of its poetic symbolism?"

Will looked at his profile instead of the grass flying by out of the window. Hannibal glanced at him, the beginnings of a smile teasing his lips.

"It represents a jealous, and violent love. A glorious thorn."

Hannibal smiled wider now and just as the clock ticked to the hour, he dialed up the radio.

"... the London police still haven't found the murderer to Tommy Aranea. The killer is suspected male and in mid thirties to forties, and incredibly dangerous. In the meantime, The Globe Theatre, where the body was found impaled on a metal spike with his tongue and stomach surgically removed, will be unfortunately, although understandably, closed indefinitely."

"Aww Hannibal. You shouldn't have."

Hannibal took Will's hand and kissed his knuckles.

Back home, with Rocko leaping about excitedly as they climbed out of the car, Will heard a trill and song. In the guttering of their roof, a grey bird with black wings and tail stared down at him curiously.

Will smiled at it.

End Notes

THERE WILL BE A SECOND CHAPTER SOON I PROMISE !!!! itll be more of an epilogue since it doesnt really follow the same plot, but its basically gonna be these two gay asses after the events of this chapters, featuring some flirting, fucking, and killing!

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